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BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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“PAN AND THE TWINS,” ETC.



LONDON
GRANT RICHARDS LTD.
ST MARTIN'S STREET
1923

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE RIVERSIDE PRESS LIMITED
EDINBURGH

UPB

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE THREE DEAD MEN	7
II. THE STYX	62
III. LILY'S STOCKING	102
IV. RED TOOTH	122
V. THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE	146
VI. THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN	161
VII. HIGH TIDE	190
VIII. MONSIEUR PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER	203
IX. CARNIVAL	232
X. THE MONKEY	257
XI. OBI	268

I

THE THREE DEAD MEN

i

WHEN Michael Duveen, the Inquiry Agent, invited me to go to the West Indies on a special mission, I rejoiced exceedingly, for the time was late January, London suffered from abominable weather and the prospect of even a few weeks in the tropics presented very real attraction.

"They offer me ten thousand pounds to go," explained Duveen, "and if it meant anything less than ten days at sea I should be pleased to do so. I've a drop of black blood in me myself, you know, and always feel some sympathy with the Ethiopians. But the sea and I are bitter enemies and I'm too old to renew our feuds. I have told them, however, that I shall send one in whom I place absolute confidence; that I shall devote personal attention to the subject from this side; and that, if we solve the mystery for them, a fee of five thousand will content me; while if we fail to do so, I shall ask nothing but your expenses. I hear to-day by cable that they are satisfied with these conditions, and I invite you, therefore, to sail in the Royal Mail Steam Packet *Don* from Southampton on Wednesday next."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Delighted, chief."

"It will be a feather in your cap if you make anything of the business. The data are involved and one cannot build the most shadowy theory of what occurred upon them. Indeed I shall not trouble you with these voluminous but vague documents. You go with an open and an empty mind, for if I hand you this screed you'll be puzzling at it all the way to Barbados and possibly arrive with some cut-and-dried idea that will stand in your way before you begin. It's a criminal case on the face of it, and involves three dead men, but apparently nobody who is alive. Quite interesting and, I should say, quite difficult; but that's only an impression. You may clear it up yourself without much trouble; or you may put me in a position to do so from England; or it may beat us both. See me again before you go, and book your passage to-day, otherwise you won't get a comfortable berth. There's a great rush amongst holiday people on the West Indies this year."

"Where am I to go?"

"Only with the home ship to Barbados. The case lies in that island alone, so far as I know. Should you have to go farther afield, of course you will do so. Good luck, my friend. I hope it's something that may prove useful to you, and I feel sanguine of your success."

I thanked the great man and withdrew well pleased, for Duveen's compliments were few and far between. He never praised, but his satisfaction

THE THREE DEAD MEN

took shape of work, and I knew very well that he had not chosen me for what sounded to be a fairly important investigation without assurance that I should do justice to his international name.

A fortnight later there came a morning when I lounged on the deserted deck of the *Don* and watched a glorious blending of moonlight and dawn. Gazing into the east about four o'clock, I saw a faint wave of rose-colour first touch the sky and quickly change to purest white and palest saffron. But as yet the moon was mistress of her domain; the stars shone brightly; the false Southern Cross sparkled undimmed, and the true constellation twinkled low upon the horizon of the sea. Then came a speedy change. Great flakes and splashes of orange light broke the east; the grey moonlight grew wan and feeble; one by one the stars went out and the Southern Cross was swallowed by the dawn.

Barbados had been for some time visible, lying like a huge sea monster between the flashing white light on Ragged Point and a crimson beacon above a farther promontory; but now the sun climbed up heaven, as only he climbs in the tropics, and the island was limned in every detail under his tremendous blaze. I saw low, undulating, cultivated lands, whereon the miles of sugar-cane looked at first like fields of grass-green wheat or barley; I noted the windmills, the dotted dwellings and brown, tilled earth; while beneath them, crowned with palms that clustered to the shore, spread Bridgetown, with its gleaming masses

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

of white architecture beside the blue waters and sun-bleached beaches.

The liner took her stately course through a crowd of lesser craft, where a hundred lighters and gay shore boats awaited her ; she threaded Carlisle Bay, dipped her red ensign to a little man-of-war, and then fired her gun, to let it be known that she had arrived at the appointed hour.

A fleet of lighters manned with men of every hue, from mahogany to brown, from yellow to putty-colour, was soon about us, while dozens of smaller vessels crowded in when the shore authorities were satisfied. The sun blazed ; the steam-winches groaned and chattered ; people rushed hither and thither shaking hands and saying farewell, gathering luggage and tipping stewards ere they departed.

Then came a message for me, and presently my trunk and kit-bags were lowered into a smart white dinghy with crimson cushions.

A good-looking man sat in it and greeted me pleasantly while two negroes pulled the boat ashore. He was browned by the tropic sun, but his grey eyes, fair hair and clean-cut cast of features proclaimed him an Englishman. He was tall, well built, and dressed in black clothes, which somewhat concealed his size and muscular development. He might have been forty-five, but life in Barbados had tended to age him, and I learned presently that he was no more than five and thirty.

THE THREE DEAD MEN

Amos Slanning, owner of the famous "Pelican" plantations and sugar factories, chatted as we rowed ashore; but he spoke with an object and gave me various items of information that served as preliminary to the story he was to tell.

"Barbados," he said, "unlike most of the West Indies, has had a fairly peaceful history. An English ship took possession of it in 1605, and it has never changed hands since. There's no more loyal corner of the Empire than 'Bimshire,' as we call this island. My family has been connected with it since the great Rebellion, for at that time a good number of broken royalists fled hither, and the Slannings were of the party. Those refugees established monarchical principles pretty firmly, and they still obtain, though perhaps we Barbadians exaggerate a little our importance in the total of things. My forbears, at anyrate, prospered from generation to generation, became great landowners and possessed large colonies of slaves. We were, in fact, before the Emancipation, the wealthiest settlers on the Caribbean, and even that event did not ruin us, as happened in many cases. You see before you the last of the West Indian Slannings. Time and chance have reduced us to one, since my twin brother, Henry, was murdered recently; and though nothing can bring him back from the grave, I shall not go to my own in peace if the mystery of his death is left unexplained."

He broke off here and asked me questions concerning Duveen, while I explained that, though

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

my chief could not come personally to explore the problem, he had sent me, that I might gather every possible particular at first-hand and report to him. I brought letters from headquarters for Mr Slanning, and presently we went together to the Ice House and sat for half-an-hour in that famous restaurant while he perused them.

During this time I had leisure to regard the life of the town beneath the shady balcony on which we sat.

There extended a street of white houses under wooden tiles grown silver-grey beneath the sun. Shop-fronts opened beneath, while above was a canopy of blue, and the glaring white roadway cast up a shimmer of fiery air, full of dust under the ceaseless footfall of the people. Noisy crowds travelled leisurely up and down. Little trams passed incessantly to Bellfield, Fontabelle and other places beyond the town ; teams of squealing mules brought in barrels of sugar and molasses from outlying estates ; donkeys bore along bright bundles of green cane-tops ; public conveyances crawled by the sidewalks, and private buggies hurried up and down. One big motor car—a curiosity at that time—stood beneath me and attracted general interest. Women filled the footways, the better sort wearing black veils to protect their eyes from the glare. With naked feet, white dresses and gay turbans, the negresses wandered chattering along, their wares upon their heads in baskets. They sold coco-nuts, sugar-cane, oranges, limes, fig-bananas, sapodillas,

THE THREE DEAD MEN

mangoes, yams, fish, cakes and sweetmeats, nuts, pine-apples, pickles, and a thousand other comestibles.

The coloured men, too, laboured in easy fashion, dragging hand-carts, driving cattle, jabbering ceaselessly, and shining like polished metal. In cool corners and where balconies threw down patches of velvet-black shadow sat the loafers and non-workers, munching cane and fruit, smoking, bargaining with the women who sold drink, sucking ice, laughing, chaffing, telling stories and playing the fool.

There were ancient beggars and swarms of children, like chocolate dolls with woolly heads and great black eyes. From time to time the glare of the street was slaked with a hose ; but the roadway was dry again in five minutes after this operation. Black policemen, dressed in white, kept order, and now and then a ragged, expostulating scamp was led away to justice. More women passed driving lean, wiry animals that looked like greyhounds, but were pigs ; while others carried Muscovy ducks under their arms, or conveyed cackling cocks and hens in wicker baskets. Of well-to-do folk there were black clergymen, black lawyers, black soldiers, black merchants and their womenfolk, flaunting gaudy hats and parasols, showy trinkets and clothes cut to bygone fashions. The store-keepers bustled about in chimney-pot hats and white ducks. Great dragon-flies flashed overhead, and the heavy air was scented with warm odours of dust and fruit.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Subconsciously I soaked in the scene; then Mr Slanning interrupted my observations.

"Now I understand," he said, "and heartily I hope you are not here in vain. We'll go to the club now and lunch. Then I'll tell you the story, as far as I know it; and then we'll drive home. You'll put up with me, I trust?"

This, however, I declined to do, and explained that it was my purpose to be entirely free during the coming weeks.

"To stop with you might handicap me in many ways," I said, and he raised no question.

The great motor car proved to be Slanning's, and we were soon on our way to the club. But an incident broke the brief journey.

There passed us a little "victoria" in which sat two ladies, and the car was stopped, while Amos Slanning dismounted and spoke with them. One, a handsome, middle-aged woman, he addressed, while the other listened. She was a very pretty young creature—an exotic here, as it seemed to me, for she was pale and her blue eyes lacked lustre. One had pictured her at home with roses in her cheeks; here she challenged one's sympathy as a hardy flower seen in a hot-house.

"Tell me you are better," said Slanning to the elder, and she shook hands warmly and assured him that she was.

"Poor May is not, however. I'm going to take her to America for the summer," she said.

"You are wise," he answered, gently regarding

THE THREE DEAD MEN

the girl. "Let her have distractions, the dear child—she needs them."

Then his voice dropped, and I doubted not that he was mentioning me.

A moment later he introduced me. The girl bowed, but did not speak; her mother shook hands and hoped that I should be successful.

"All who loved my dear friend's brother share his sorrow," she said quietly. "And there is nobody on earth who knew him that did not love him. But you are faced with great difficulties, for this shocking deed was without motive so far as any human being can see."

She spoke clearly and with deep earnestness, and added that she hoped I would come to see her, if I found it desirable to do so.

They drove on, and Slanning trusted that I had marked them carefully.

"Nothing," he said, "connects them with my brother's death, and yet, to my mind, there may exist some link. They are dear friends, and Lady Warrender's late husband, General Sir George Warrender, was also a close friend to my brother and myself. But, all unconsciously and innocently, the ladies may, none the less, be involved, in some way hidden both from themselves and us. That will be for you to consider when you know all that I can tell you."

"The girl looks very ill," I said.

"She is—with reason. But the illness is of the mind, not the body. She has had a sad shock."

We reached a public square, wherein the object

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

of chief interest was a green-bronze statue of Lord Nelson ; and then arriving at Slanning's club, alighted and presently enjoyed a lunch of many delicacies.

After the meal, he led me into a small, private smoking-room, where we should be alone. He offered a cigar, which I declined, since the business of my visit was now to begin. Nor did he smoke himself, but entered at once upon his narrative.

"Stop me and ask any questions that may occur to you," he said, and then proceeded.

"My mother died when Henry and I were boys of fourteen years old. We were in England at the time and had just gone from a preparatory school to Harrow. From there we proceeded together to Cambridge. During the winter vacations we used to come out to my father here ; while in the summer he usually visited Europe and took us with him to France or Italy. We were just completing our years at the university when my father, Fitzherbert Slanning, passed away somewhat suddenly—he had always been a delicate man—and Henry and I were called to the estates. My father always held that absentee landlords were the ruin of the West Indies and, long before he died, made us promise to live and work here. We kept our word.

"It is, I believe, a rooted opinion that twins resemble each other closely in every particular of appearance and character and taste ; and doubtless it often happens so ; but I cannot flatter myself that I am half the man my brother was.

THE THREE DEAD MEN

He possessed better brains, better judgment and a larger measure of self-control. We resembled each other superficially, but he revealed a more thoughtful countenance and a less impetuous disposition. I would not say that I was the optimist and Henry the pessimist ; but whereas my nature leads me to be sanguine and trustful, he was more cautious and a far shrewder judge of character.

" We had a valuable overseer, faithful to my father and trained in a school to whom the Slannings were a tradition. He helped to seat us in the saddle, and since we were both workers, and well educated, we carried on with success the great sugar industry that our ancestors had founded. Now I am last of my line, and no other Slanning than myself has any direct interest in the ' Pelican ' Estates. They are mine, together with the revenues they furnish and responsibilities they embrace.

" Life passed for Henry and myself uneventfully and prosperously. We were everything on earth to each other, and had not, as I believed, an idea unshared, or an ambition not held in common. I stuck to the business entirely ; Henry developed wider activities, joined the administration and did useful public work. He was a man of extraordinary generosity ; he loved to advance the welfare of the island and the humblest upon it. If it can be said of any man that he had not an enemy, that can be said of my brother. He was the soul of justice and displayed an enthusiasm for humanity that won the respect of the rich and

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

the worship of the poor. Yet this man has been deliberately destroyed by a fellow-man under circumstances of the profoundest mystery; and when he perished another died also—one who would have laid down his life for Henry, or myself, a thousand times. This was John Diggle, a full-blooded negro, whose forbears have worked for generations at the ‘Pelican.’ He was a watchman, and his business required that he should guard the plantations at night. The looser sort of niggers will always pilfer, and none is immune from that annoyance. At the time of cane-cutting, therefore, we look after our boundaries; and if the blackguards who come thieving know that they may get a bullet about their ears they think twice before committing depredations.

“It was an old custom that niggers found by our estate police in the cane by night were challenged, and if they did not respond, fired upon. It is a very ancient enactment—of course not followed nowadays.

“The manner of Henry’s death I will now describe. After a night of full moon, he did not join me at breakfast according to his habit, and, sending a servant to seek him, I found he was neither in his bedroom nor study.

“Puzzled, I looked round myself, but could see nothing of him. Then came the evil news from the cane-fields, and I mounted my horse and rode out to a spot, a mile from home, lying in a clearing on the outskirts of the plantations

THE THREE DEAD MEN

not very far from the Crane Hotel on the south coast of the island. My brother was lying dead, shot through the breast, and, actually upon him, John Diggle also lay—a corpse. His gun, with both barrels discharged, was found nearly twenty yards from the bodies; and that it was Diggle's gun which had destroyed both my dear brother and himself there could be no question, for the cartridges were of a peculiar bore and the heavy swan shot unlike anything else of this sort in Barbados.

"Another weapon was also discovered — a revolver, brand new, and with all its chambers empty. It had evidently never been fired, and I had never seen it or heard of it; but subsequent investigation showed that my brother had bought it in England with a box of a hundred cartridges which was never even opened. The revolver is one of Forrest's make, and why Henry bought it—seeing his curious hatred and dread of fire-arms—is a part of this mystery.

"Medical examination proved that neither man had been shot at close range—a fact that disposed of an obvious theory. For the local police—coloured people—suspected that poor Diggle had murdered Henry and then shot himself; but this is impossible. First, he worshipped Henry as something more than a man, and would have suffered any imaginable torture rather than hurt a hair of his head; and, secondly, he himself was shot from some distance off. From the nature of the wounds it was calculated that the gun

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

must have been fired at a range of twenty yards—the distance it was found lying from the bodies.

“Ten yards from the spot where my brother fell, hidden in the plantation, we came upon a pile of cut cane and one of the common axes used for cutting it. This would not have been there under normal circumstances and pointed to the fact of a thief. He had apparently been busy when disturbed. But of him no trace is forthcoming, though a handsome reward and free pardon have been offered to the rascal if he will step forward and tell us anything he knows.

“Why my brother was out that night is, of course, part of this problem; for there existed no shadow of reason that he should have been. He never did such a thing, to my knowledge, before, and though he often took solitary rides and walks, being of a meditative spirit, it was not, of course, his rule to rise after retiring. Yet, on the night of his death, he must have awakened from sleep, drawn on his boots, flung a black alpaca coat over his pyjamas, and sauntered out a mile or more into the plantations, to the beat where he knew that Diggle would be doing his work and keeping his rounds.

“I now come to the third man who appears to have lost his life on this fatal night. Personally I do not associate him in any way with the story I have told you. I see no shadow of connection between the two crimes, and I am tolerably confident—indeed we all are—that the poor wretch

THE THREE DEAD MEN

known as Solly Lawson got his throat cut by an enemy.

"He was a half-caste employed at the 'Pelican,' who lived with an old black mother in a cabin near the cliffs. He was a worthless, hot-tempered beggar, with a dog-like affection for my brother and myself; but he quarrelled with his fellows and always gave himself great airs on the strength of his white blood. Solly had a way with the ladies also, and made a good deal of trouble in his own circle of society. He has fought various battles and figured in more than one paternity case; but though the unfortunate fellow thus earned some reprobation, we, weakly enough, forgave him a great many of his faults, for he was a mirth-provoking spirit with ready wit; and as much for his old mother and his dead father's sake as his own, we kept him on and forgave him his stupid' sins. He had been locked up twice, and he knew that one more serious offence would be the last, so far as the 'Pelican' was concerned; but it seemed of late that he had reformed and was becoming a responsible member of the community. So, at least, old Mrs Lawson declared.

"Well, on the dark day of this double murder, came news of Solly Lawson's end. The debonair creature, so witty and full of life—such a secret joy to us and such a source of endless exasperation to his fellows—was found dead with his throat cut from ear to ear.

"An accident revealed the murder, for the body lay on a shelf under the cliffs, midway between

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

the summit and the deep sea that rolled beneath. It was evident that those responsible for his destruction had flung him over, after murdering him, and that instead of falling into the water two hundred feet below, as they intended, the unseen ledge had received him. From this, when found, he was subsequently lowered into a boat and brought ashore. The fall had broken several bones, but the fatal wound was in his throat.

"In his case, also, no motive whatever for his murder has appeared; and though I doubt not it was over some woman that he finally came to grief, nothing throws light on the subject, and nobody in Barbados can be fairly suspected of the business.

"Thus we have three capital crimes, all of which, on the face of it, are motiveless; and while in the case of Solly, as I say, we may feel very sure that he awakened some secret malignity and brought his punishment upon himself—while there probably are those among us who know the secret of his death—yet, so far as my brother and John Diggle are concerned, no shadow of reason for their destruction can be found on the island, or in the world.

"Of my brother I have spoken; while Diggle, in his humble capacity, similarly enjoyed universal respect and regard. We had not a more popular servant on the plantation, or in the factories. He leaves a wife and three youngsters, and my brother was godfather to the eldest.

"That is the dreadful outline you will have to

THE THREE DEAD MEN

fill in, young man ; and now please ask me what questions may occur to you, unless you would rather leave them for a later occasion."

"I shall have many questions to ask, Mr Slanning," I answered ; "but at this point perhaps you will tell me a little about Lady Warrender and her daughter ?"

"Gladly. The incident which connects them with my brother's name lies outside those I have narrated ; nor can I link it with Henry's death. But you will approach this matter with an open mind, and in any case must hear it and regard it as a strict confidence. This was one of those few experiences that my dear brother kept from me entirely ; nor should I have ever known but for the ladies themselves.

"A year ago now Henry told me I ought to marry, and I retorted that it was quite as much his business as mine. He admitted it, and we chaffed one another ; but I regarded him as an incurable bachelor and believed myself to be one. In truth, however, Henry desired to marry, and, with what looks now like extraordinary secrecy, cultivated little May Warrender. Her mother did not know it until afterwards ; but when Henry died, the girl revealed to her mother that he had much desired to marry her and proposed twice."

"You have no reason to doubt her ?"

"None, for she is not the sort to invent such a story. Perhaps, if I had heard such a thing from anybody but these people, I might have disbelieved ; but it is impossible to question them.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Henry evidently loved her and strove hard to win her ; but he looked old for his age, and doubtless seemed older than he was to a girl not twenty. Whether he was deeply disappointed or not can never be known. He was such a philosopher that I do not suppose he allowed the matter to trouble him more than was inevitable. May liked him immensely, and after he died she was quite ill for a time ; but when she told her mother, she also declared that marriage with him would have been impossible. Probably, as I say, his reverse did not cast Henry down unduly, for he was a very quick-minded and intelligent man and a great student of human nature. Moreover, had it made any very poignant impression upon him, I cannot think it would have been hidden from me, even had he tried to hide it. We knew each other too well, and he certainly did not depart at that time from his customary steadfast frame of mind—not before me, at any rate. He was level-headed and well-balanced as usual."

So Amos Slanning's statement ended, and what chiefly struck me were the innumerable permutations and combinations that might be drawn from it. That the speaker had told me the truth, as he saw it, I could not doubt. He was a simple-minded, ingenuous man, and evidently very deeply moved by his loss. For the rest, it became a question how to pursue my inquiries to the best advantage.

The local police had no theory and no clue ; while those chiefly interested in the dead were in

THE THREE DEAD MEN

the same predicament. Nobody could fit the facts together and make a rational story out of them ; indeed the very material seemed doubtful, for the body of opinion separated the death of the young half-caste, Solly Lawson, from that of the others, and held it only a coincidence that he had lost his life at the same time.

After his recital Mr Slanning took me for a long ride about the island, and we stopped at the scenes of the incidents in his story. Mile after mile of sugar-cane extended upon every side of us. Great jungles of it fringed the road with the drooping polished stems—tawny tangles of dried leaves below and bright green crowns above. Narrow irrigation ditches made a network of the land, and about the prevalent cane ascended sometimes clumps of banana, their broad leaves tattered in the wind. Here and there rose bread-fruit trees and groves of handsome mahogany, or tamarind, to offer welcome shade.

Beside a little house surrounded by a hedge of prickly pear, a calabash-tree grew, and its green, polished fruit hung from jagged, almost leafless boughs.

"That's where poor Diggle's widow lives," said Slanning, "and we are within a mile of the scene of the tragedy. Now you can see the general outline of the 'Pelican' Estates, sweeping in an arc to north and south and ranging almost to the coral cliffs near the Crane Hotel. If you won't come to me, you might take quarters there, to be on the scene of your work."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

But knowing not where that work would be, I determined for the present to remain in Bridgetown, and after standing in a clearing on the scene of his brother's death and visiting the stately home of the last of the Barbados Slannings, I returned to town and presently took a couple of rooms in a secluded square not far from the club.

ii

My object was to work unknown, as much as possible, and in this ambition Amos Slanning assisted me. My business was not specified, though I soon found that most people were aware of it. I wanted, of course, to learn much that the dead man's brother could not tell me, and since the matter still remained a nine days' wonder, all men were glad enough to talk about it, and the conversation in the club smoking-room often drifted round to it.

I had been elected a temporary member of this institution and spent a few days almost entirely within its walls. I found Amos Slanning immensely popular; indeed even more so than Henry had been; for while men spoke of the dead with respect, and deplored his sudden end, it seemed that he had not awakened enthusiasm. Indeed the rest of mankind saw him with different eyes from his twin. A Creole lawyer at the club knew both well, and gave me a friendly but independent description of them.

"Henry Slanning was a man of affairs," he said. "He had ambition and little liked to be

THE THREE DEAD MEN

contradicted. But few ever contradicted him, for he was a very sane man, a sound democrat, and knew the trend of contemporary thought. You can form no complete opinion of him through his brother. He had none of the sanguine spirit and natural cheerfulness that marks Amos. He was, in fact, of a sombre cast of mind."

"Have you any theory of events?" I asked for the sake of conversation, and the other answered that he had none.

"Had Henry been faced with any great and crushing disappointment," he said, "or had he found himself up against some stroke of fate beyond the power of his money, or brains, to withstand, I can imagine he might have destroyed himself. His brother, of course, says that under no conceivable circumstances would he have done such a thing; others, however, agree with me so far. But this is no suicide obviously. He was deliberately shot from some distance—twenty yards at least, the doctors say."

So he spoke, and others also furnished some items of information, or some experiences throwing light on character. All helped to complete the picture of Henry Slanning; but none, from his brother to the billiard-marker at the club, could give a comprehensive portrait; and I perceived the picture might never be completed, unless Duveen himself proved equal to that task.

Almost my first visit was to Lady Warrender, and her description of the murdered man differed slightly from the rest. She said he was of a

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

religious temperament, but unorthodox and not devoted to any particular form of faith.

"He would have ended his days a Catholic, if he had lived," she declared, and proceeded : "He had an intellectual taste and liked metaphysical and psychological problems. My late husband shared his inquiries, and they enjoyed interminable arguments on the subject of freewill and determination, faith and reason, and so on. There was a side of Henry which you may say was completely hidden from his brother. Indeed Henry knew that he possessed a far subtler intellect and a much larger power of imagination. He loved Amos dearly ; but more as a father loves a son than as a brother loves a brother. He never troubled Amos with his own deep meditations, or questioned his brother's faith. He was always very careful never to speak of things before Amos that would have put his brother in a false position, or make him appear mentally inferior in general conversation. He was most tender and sensitive to all. But he hated vain and self-sufficient people, and resented criticism of the West Indies in general and Barbados in particular."

"You did not know that he desired to marry Miss Warrender ?"

"I had no idea of it. Sometimes I chaffed him and his brother about finding wives and not letting the famous Barbados Slannings die out with them ; but Henry always said that Amos was the marrying man. May would have kept his proposal a secret, as he begged her to do, had it not been for

THE THREE DEAD MEN

his death. Then she felt it was only right to confide in me, and I told his brother. One never knows what may bear upon a question."

"You noticed no change in him latterly?"

"None. It was about six weeks after his second rejection that he died."

"Should you have objected to such a marriage?"

"I should not have interfered. He was a distinguished and honourable man—a gentleman in the highest sense of the term. My daughter liked him, and it hurt her much to make him sad; but she did not love him. Though only fifteen years older than May, he seemed far more to her: he was old for his age—a staid, quiet man, averse from society, fond of reading, and with no pleasures in which the average girl could share. He would have made a splendid husband, but not for May."

Gradually I built up the vision of Henry Slanning, yet I cannot say that I ever saw the man very clearly. He came and went, sometimes grew clear, then receded again. Some, I found, held him a cynic, with the warm heart a cynic often conceals; others, of a religious frame of mind, doubted him as a freethinker. None denied that much good could be credited to him; but only in one quarter, and that very unexpected, did I find a suggestion that he had ever committed an act open to question.

I visited the widow of John Diggle, who proved a talker. But she was intelligent, her memory seemed trustworthy and her honesty obvious. She was gathering washing from the thorny hedge

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

outside her little home, and chattered mournfully of the dead night-watchman and his virtues.

"Him not hab an enemy, sar—de kindest man and de best husband. Him work for Marse Henry an' Marse Amos for years an' years, an' nebber a hard word from dem all de time. Dey fink de world ob him, an' my po' John, he fink de world ob dem."

"Let me come into your house and sit down, Mrs Diggle, out of the sun. I'm sure everybody has been very sorry for you. Mr Diggle was greatly respected."

"A most respectable man, sar, an' only wicked rogues dat tief de cane ebber quarrel wid him."

"Had he any quarrel with Solly Lawson, the poor nigger who had his throat cut?"

"Nebber. He knew Solly was a wild nigger; but John 'markable gentle wid young men, and he said Solly mend some day. He a most Christian person, my John."

"Tell me about him. I am very interested to hear about him."

She rambled on for a while, and gradually I brought her to her last memories of the man.

"Did he ever do anything that Mr Henry didn't approve?"

"No, sar—nebber."

"Did Mr Henry ever do anything your husband didn't approve?"

"No, sar; Marse Henry a good man. But—but—"

"They always agreed?"

THE THREE DEAD MEN

"Now you say dat, I 'member a queer fing, sar. One day—one, two, free day before him shot, my John came in sad to him breakfus', an' I say, 'What de matter, John?' An' him say, 'Nuffin'. But I say, 'Dar somefin,' 'cause yo' head wrinkle up an' you puff fro' your nose.' An' him say, 'You dam silly old woman, Jane.' Den, 'fore he go out in de pigeon peas to work, he say, 'Blast dem wicked folk dat steal de cane—dey make trouble, an' it fall on me.'"

"Was much cane being stolen?"

"No, sar. Dar always a little gwine by night; an' John, he catch a man sometimes; but it nuffin' much, an' I nebber heard him worry 'bout it. So I say, 'Yo' no' worry, John, 'bout a silly fing like dat,' an' he say, 'I got to worry, 'cause Marse Henry, him worry. An' Marse Henry, him tell me I no' sharp enough an' no' do my duty to de tiefs an' forget how to treat de rogues.' I terrible surprised to hear my husband say dat, an' John, he run on, an' he say he do what he told in de future, whatebber happen, an' no' question orders; an' I say, 'You always do what you told, John.'"

"Did he explain any more about it?"

"No. Him go 'way growling; but him soon get happy again. He said no mo' 'bout it, an' I fink no mo' 'bout it till John gone killed an' Marse Henry gone killed; an' den I wish I knew more 'bout it; but too late den. Po' John—him shot in de side, an' him heart blown to pieces."

"I suppose Mr Slanning couldn't have shot your husband?"

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Me Gard! Marse Henry shoot John? Yo' might as well fink John shoot Marse Henry. Marse Henry a gemman dat hated killing anyfing. Him nebber fired a gun in him life. Him nebber squashed a scorpion. He loved John, for him told me so, when John ill once. An' John—him have died a hundred times for Marse Henry, or Marse Amos. He berry faithful man an' live for his masters."

"Have you any idea in your own mind, Mrs Diggle, what happened? If John has sometimes arrested men for stealing sugar-cane, he may have had enemies."

"No, de man or two dat went to prison no fink bad ob John. It all in de day's work for bad man to be catch some time. And John—him shot wid his own gun—'member dat. John carry his gun himself. He nebber put it out of him hand."

"It would have been impossible, you think, for anybody to get his gun away from John?"

"Only Marse Henry do dat. If Marse Henry come by night an' say, 'Lend me yo' gun, John,' den John lend him. But Marse Henry no want gun. Him hate guns."

"Did your husband ever say he had met Mister Slanning on his rounds by night?"

"Nebber, sar. He sure tell me if such a funny fing as dat happen, 'cause Marse Henry and Marse Amos, dey never go near de plantations by night."

"Have any of your friends any idea what may have happened?"

"Only silly folk. Dey fink de debble tell Marse

THE THREE DEAD MEN

Henry to go out in de night an' put it in John's head to shoot him; an' den de debble shoot John; but what Gard A'mighty doin' all de time? Marse Henry an' John berry good men, an' dey in Hebben now wid golden crowns on der heads an' golden wings an' golden harps, sar; but dat de will ob Gard. An' it no better for de wicked murderer dat dey happy now. He go to Hell all de same whar him belong."

"You don't think Solly Lawson had anything to do with it?"

"I doan know nuffin' 'bout dat. He killed dead too, so nobody nebber know if him dar or not."

"He was a sort of chap who might steal cane?"

"Him tief plenty cane, I daresay, massa; but him nebber do nuffin' against Marse Henry—Marse Henry stand up for him plenty times. De niggers tief cane, because dey terrible ignorant fellows an' no fink how wicked dey are; but dey no fall out widudder gemmen about it. Dat po' Solly—if him see anybody treating John bad, or treating Marse Henry bad, he run to help dem, I'se sure."

She whined on—a shrewd, sensible creature enough, and one sorrowed for her grief, for she often stopped talking to weep. It was personal mourning at her loss and no fear for the future that troubled her, for Amos Slanning had provided for her and her children.

And elsewhere, a few days later, my inquiries

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

took me to see another, sad, black woman, the mother of the murdered Solly Lawson.

She dwelt by some coral steps cut in the cliff face not far from the seaward boundaries, and her cabin was approached over a parched headland where grew opuntia and hugh aloes on the scorched earth. Great, winged grasshoppers leapt and flew lazily, their gauzes flashing; lizards basked in the blaze of naked sunshine, and a deep silence reigned, only broken by the husky stridulation of the insects. One black goat stalked here, and, in a dried water-course, there hopped a solitary frog. Upon the fleshy leaves of the aloes holiday folk had cut their initials, and lovers, too, had set their names enwoven.

Mrs Mary Lawson's cabin stood near the place of her son's death. She was a little, withered negress who had married an Englishman—an old sailor, who found work at the "Pelican" when he left the coasting trade in the Antilles. Mary could add little to my knowledge; but she confirmed what others had said of Solly.

"Him no berry bad, sar—only fond ob de gals an' berry good-looking—my dear boy was. He lost him head and did silly fings an' fell out wid de neighbours; but him no wicked deep down, an' him always terrible sorry after. Him so much full ob life dat it run away wid him—a berry 'scitable boy, sar, an' dash at fings an' often get in a mess, but ebb'rybody forgib him after him sorry. An' Marse Henry—he nebber rough wid Solly, 'cause Solly so quick wid him tongue, he

THE THREE DEAD MEN

always get round Marse Henry, an' Marse Amos too, an' make dem laugh."

"He was fond of them?"

"He lub dem—nuffing too good for dem—he tell me dat a fousand times. All de world lub dem—dar nobody on de earf dat would hurt dem. An' if Solly see anybody do harm to Marse Henry or Marse Diggle—he—so fierce him be—dat he fight dem an' no care if he kill dem."

"He was friendly with John Diggle too?"

"Yes, sar—he friendly to Marse Diggle. Marse Diggle a berry nice gemman, an' kind to my son when odder folks cross wid him."

"But suppose Marse Diggle had seen your son stealing sugar-cane?"

"Den Marse Diggle would hab got Solly lock up. God forgib my Solly, dat happened one or two times; but John forgib Solly after him punished, an' Solly no angry wid Marse Diggle after. When a fing done, it done, sar."

"You wouldn't say that Solly might not have been stealing cane that night?"

"No, sar, I wouldn't say dat. He might; but I no fink him dar. I no fink him far from him home. I fink some bad men quarrel wid Solly ober a gal, an' lie hid for him, an' pounce on my po' boy while him come home, an' kill him."

"More men than one?"

"Yes, because Solly berry quick an' strong. Dar no nigger in dese parts strong enough to kill my Solly single-handed wid a knife, an' den fro him over de cliff. It take six, sebben men to do dat."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

She dwelt on her son's great strength with mournful satisfaction.

"You cannot give a name to anybody who might have had a grudge against him?"

"No, sar—nobody. Him been berry good boy for long time now. An' I ask all de niggers if dey know anybody what hab a down on Solly, an' nobody know. But dar must be somebody done it. I fink sailor men, who sail away de next day, might hab done it."

"You know of no girl who cared for your son, or quarrelled with him?"

"Plenty gals, sar; but he only friends wid one gal in Georgetown now, an' she hab no friends but Solly, an' she terrible fond ob him."

"He treated her well?"

"Berry kind an' good to her. She tell yo' de same if yo' ask her."

Further inquiries respecting the character and history of John Diggle and Solly Lawson confirmed these reports of wife and mother. Independent witnesses agreed with them and with Amos Slanning, who had already told me the same story. It was indeed a curious coincidence that the three dead men all lacked any sinister or dangerously unsocial qualities. Of the young half-caste, though it was clear he had been lawless and more or less disreputable, it seemed unlikely that he could have wakened sufficient enmity to lose his life for his sins. The negroes threaten great things; but I learned they seldom rise to capital crime, and a cold-blooded,

THE THREE DEAD MEN

premeditated taking off, such as had fallen to the lot of the unfortunate Solly, seemed difficult to explain, or parallel from experience. That it had actually happened was clear enough; but that it could have happened without leaving a sign or clue behind, without wakening a suspicion in any quarter, or incriminating, however remotely, a single soul, greatly puzzled the local police.

These gentlemen I found intelligent enough, and it was clear they had pursued the original inquiries in an effective and thoroughly professional manner after conventional and sound methods. No difficulties were thrown in their way, and there was not a soul in Barbados, apparently, who would not willingly have assisted their inquiries had it been in his power. Not the most shadowy explanation of the crime rewarded their energetic investigation, nor could the hundred and one amateur detectives who strove to solve the mystery throw any light upon it.

Most people I found separated the death of Slanning and Diggle from that of Solly Lawson. Indeed the only thing that might link them was the pile of cut cane near the spot where Henry Slanning and his watchman had fallen. But while this appeared to be the work of a nightly robber who had been surprised, none could say that Solly was the man. And had he been, it was exceedingly certain that he would have made no attempt on the life either of his master or the night-watchman. Indeed the rolls of the "Pelican" Estate, or any other estate, held no character, among many

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

workers, who could be pointed to as capable of such a crime. To be caught stealing cane was a very venial offence in Ethiopian eyes. The possibility of a white man stealing cane appeared remote; yet some shared Mrs Lawson's impression that a sailor, or sailors, might be implicated. No justification for any such opinion appeared, however.

To explain why Henry Slanning had gone out in the night challenged me as the pregnant point ; and, given the reason for that most unusual step, everything else might have followed from it ; but no reason offered ; at every turn in this exasperating inquiry I was headed off, by a blank wall as it seemed, for the purpose and motive, though they must have existed for every secret incident in this web, proved absolutely beyond my power to discover. Henry Slanning had clearly gone where he knew John Diggle was to be found on his rounds ; but whether he had actually sought Diggle, or another, could never be known, unless a living man, or woman, furnished the information. None, however, came forward ; there was an extraordinary lack of all evidence ; for in such cases, nine times out of ten, chance offers a foothold for a first step, through some incident, or observation, that may open the way to inquiry, or suggest a train of research. But no such thing happened for me. None bore any testimony of any sort whatever, and none actually came within the radius of the inquiry. Here apparently one stood confronted with three barefaced and deliberate murders, committed

THE THREE DEAD MEN

in one night on a small island, yet not a shadow of any motive explained them, and not a living being could fairly be pointed at as suspect in the slightest degree.

I made very copious notes and, of course, pursued inquiry through many minor channels, which all ended in failure and contributed no light. I stood in the disagreeable position of being unable to make a case, and after six weeks of very hard and conscientious work, was forced to own it to myself. A loss of self-esteem resulted. I began all over again, only to complete another circle of failure. Nor could it be called comparative unsucces. The futility of my investigation was almost absurdly complete. I arrived at no theory of any sort or kind, and though once I glimpsed the truth darkly, as afterwards appeared, I wandered from the right road the moment it began to appear wrong.

My last week at Barbados, the last of six spent upon the subject, was devoted largely to Amos Slanning. He had been extraordinarily kind to me personally and insisted upon my spending a few days at the "Pelican" Estate, as his guest, before I left the West Indies. He was frankly disappointed at my failure, but not more than I myself confessed to being. It is true that, though trained to this work by instinct and native bent, with already some fair share of success in various obscure cases, I failed utterly here.

I could only admit it and hope my chief might prove more fortunate. We talked much of Henry

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Slanning ; indeed I kept the conversation to him as far as one decently might, and not only with his twin brother ; for now I saw the truth of what men had told me—that Amos entertained an opinion of his brother that differed from the truth. He did not undervalue his rectitude, or the regard and respect universally extended to the dead man ; but he had never fathomed a character very different from his own, and probably never felt, even if he had seen, the intellectual and inquisitive side of Henry Slanning's mind. For example, when I returned to the possibility of suicide, a thought that haunted me in connection with the case, though the facts were there to prove murder, Amos Slanning assured me that nothing was more unlikely, and even when the revolver was proved to have been bought in England by his brother, he stoutly protested that it could not have been purchased with any thought of such a purpose. Others, however, saw no improbability in the idea of Henry Slanning's suicide under certain circumstances ; but, since an obvious murder and not suicide confronted us, they saw no object in raising the question.

I begged a photograph of the dead man to take home with the rest of my elaborate *dossier*. The picture he lent me resembled Amos himself closely in feature, but the expression was different—subtler and more melancholy. Indeed it was a face where unrest had made a home, and one had judged that the man who looked so must be defeated of his life's ambitions. Yet no cynicism

THE THREE DEAD MEN

clouded his features, and the mouth was as kindly as his brother's, if firmer. The photograph had been taken before Slanning's love affair ; but what proved more interesting to me came into my hands by accident two days before I left the island on my homeward way. Amos, searching among his brother's things, had found a diary, which contained nothing that threw illumination upon the past and evidently abstained of set purpose from any mention of Henry's romance ; but, in addition to this, he discovered a pile of manuscript—the musings of an intellectual man on a variety of subjects, all of direct human interest. Study of Henry Slanning's personal library had already convinced me of his activity in the domain of thought ; while Lady Warrender had confirmed the fact. His books were for the most part philosophical, and I found a translation of Gomperz that had clearly occupied much of his time, and translations of other German writers, including the English version in twenty volumes of Nietzsche. He had Gilbert Murray's Greek tragedians also, with Plato and Aristotle, deeply read. His interest evidently ran on the great pagans. As to his own writings, they reminded one of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. They abounded in curious quotations and tended to the morbid ; but they were full of illumination and revealed the character of the man through his interests. He had compiled on love, passion, ambition, patience, duty, suicide, justice, free thought, and free will as opposed to destiny. He was clearly a rationalist at this stage

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

of his life, and acknowledged no supernatural inhibition to conduct ; but his sense of duty was exquisitely keen ; he debated questions of justice with a mind as impartial as distinguished, and one felt in the presence of a man who was almost weighed down by his obligations to his fellow-creatures. He wrote of mastery and domination, of craft and the unhappy need for falsehood in the affairs of life, of heredity and environment as rival, or twin, forces in development of character.

I begged these voluminous documents, since, in my opinion, they must prove of great value to Duveen when he came to investigate Henry Slanning's fate ; and his brother was content that I should take them with me.

"I shall publish the whole thing presently," he assured me. "It will be a valuable memorial of Henry and help to show the world that he was a remarkable man, and a far greater thinker than people supposed."

And so I left the West Indies (picking up the steamship *Don* on her return voyage from Jamaica), and departed, grateful for much kindness and consideration, and the richer for a good friend or two—men who are still my friends. But I was disappointed and chagrined to the very roots of my being at this blank failure to advance, by a single fruitful speculation, the problems I had gone so many miles, and worked so exceedingly hard, to resolve.

My utter failure had one good result, for it awoke the interest of Michael Duveen, and he

THE THREE DEAD MEN

did not conceal his astonishment at a fiasco so complete.

"A dozen theories, of course, I had," I explained ; "but each in turn came up against a blank negation. I could find no sort of explanation that fitted all the facts—worse, I could find no explanation that fitted any of them. So far as I could discover, as a result of sleepless search, these three men had not between them a real enemy in the world ; nor was it possible to meet anybody living, or hear of anybody living, who gained a thing by the death of any of them. You'll say, of course, that Amos Slanning gains ; but in reality he does not, for he and Henry had practically everything in common and were very deeply attached to each other. If one thing is certain, where all is so uncertain, I should say it was the absolute innocence of Amos Slanning. The weirdest thing is, that against the evidence of my own senses and the fact of murder duly proved—murder, of course, by a person or persons unknown—I still find my mind coming back and back to the conviction that it simply cannot be. There was nobody on earth to murder Slanning ; but there was a reason in his own mind for him to commit suicide. And yet he didn't."

Duveen patted me on the shoulder.

"We shall see whether you are to be forgiven," he said. "You have at least roused my curiosity, and I may better judge, when I set to work on your notes, if you have failed as hopelessly as you imagine. Meantime there is plenty to do. Come

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

and dine with me a week hence, if nothing happens to prevent you ; then you shall hear your sentence, or your acquittal, as the case may be. The change has done you good. Save for your remorseful expression, I never saw you looking so well."

Thus he dismissed me, and I felt glad to think of other things until the evening came on which I was to dine with him. He put me off for a further week, however, but saw me at his office and asked a few questions concerning the West Indian problem. These I answered, and he made no comment on my replies.

Then I dined with him, and after the meal he read me the following report.

"I have solved the problem," he said.

"Solved it?" I gasped.

"To my own satisfaction ; and I shall be disappointed if not to yours also. You are not to blame. You did everything that I should, or could, have done myself. You lacked the necessary synthetic inspiration to put the pieces of the puzzle together after collecting them—that is all."

"That is everything."

"You were right. Your intuition had only to be followed, but, basely, you deserted it."

"How could I follow it against an absolute fact?"

"My dear friend, no fact is absolute."

"But murder can't be suicide."

"Murder may be suicide and suicide may be murder. Don't make rash assertions, but light

THE THREE DEAD MEN

your cigar and listen. I'm rather pleased with this ; though it is quite possible that nobody but our noble selves will appreciate it at its true value. From your description of Amos Slanning, I am quite sure that he will not. Therefore let us expect no reward."

Then he read me his solution of the mystery.

iii

"Only through a close and exhaustive study of character is it possible to reach any explanation of this problem ; and in the case of Mr Henry Slanning, on whose death the destruction of the lesser men, John Diggle and Solly Lawson, will be found to depend, ample material for an estimate of his complex temperament exists. Not only from the facts recorded concerning him, but also from his own dissertations and meditations, he may be measured ; and it is from my estimate of him, built on elaborate data, that I reconstruct the incidents which deprived him and the other two victims of their lives.

"Emphatically, Solly Lawson's end forms a part of the larger problem, for I find in him a very vital component of the whole. Accident involved him in the heart of the catastrophe, and without him we should have had one dead man instead of three and a tragedy of an interesting psychological nature, but no mystery whatever. For the mystery now to be explained is not the premeditated work of man, but the blind operation of chance.

"Let us then glance first at character, and take

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

the dead in rotation. As I shall show, we are concerned alone with them. No undiscovered villains lurk in hiding ; no living man, unless it be myself, yet understands the secret. These three alone are responsible for their own undoing ; or it would be more correct to say that an egregious action of Henry Slanning precipitated the death of the other victims.

"Henry Slanning we find to be of cultured and refined tastes, averse from even the incidental violence of sport. Mrs Jane Diggle said of him that 'he could not squash a scorpion.' He was shrewd, sagacious, and a good man of business. The power of wealth he inherited and did not abuse. He worked hard with an exemplary humanity and consideration for all he employed. He was generous, thoughtful and kind-hearted ; nor did he lack for ambition beyond his own prosperity and the well-being of his many employees, for we find him accepting civil offices in Barbados and devoting no small measure of his time to unpaid labour for the general weal. This is the outer man and the personality familiar to his brother, his friends and acquaintance ; but there is another Henry Slanning — an 'intellectual' of inquiring spirit, a ceaseless searcher after curious knowledge, a voluminous reader and a keen thinker along certain lines. He is interested in many things ; but particular subjects possess for him a peculiar fascination, and one above all others would seem persistently to intrigue his mind. It is a morbid

THE THREE DEAD MEN

subject hardly to be associated with a prosperous, hale and popular young man of thirty-five ; but there can be no doubt of the fact, since not only was it reported to my colleague from more than one quarter in the course of his independent inquiry, but we also find it an ever-present theme of Henry Slanning's careful memoranda. He commits himself to a definite opinion upon it ; he ransacks profane literature for his support and also finds justification for his conclusions in Christian history.

"To this we will return. For the moment it is necessary to show how, what possessed, in the first place, no more than an abstract and academic interest for Henry Slanning, rose to become a personal problem and a personal temptation. He had tasted what life could offer and had, apparently, reached to the summit of his own ambitions, when there came into his life a new and tremendous experience. He fell in love for the first time. His brother, who was never absent from him, assures us that he had not before declared or revealed any affection for a woman ; and though we have no absolute proof of this, since in the case of his known attachment, Mr Amos Slanning was entirely ignorant of it until after his death—though, therefore, we cannot say with conviction that Henry never loved before, it is reasonable to assume that no master-passion overwhelmed him until he found himself in love with Miss May Warrender.

"It is certain that he was deeply attached to

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

her, though his reserved and sensitive nature concealed the fact from all but the young lady herself. He paid his devotions with such delicacy, such humility, and such refinement as might be expected from such a man ; and we may assume he was sanguine, for his life had moved easily and successfully. He had much to offer, and the object of his affections, as we know, was inexperienced, and declares that for a long time she did not appreciate the significance of his friendship. Few girls who did not yet know the meaning of love would have refused him ; and she had, in all innocence, welcomed his advances, so that we may assume that he felt little doubt of acceptance.

"I insist on the extent of Mr Slanning's disappointment when he heard that his hope was vain ; and I believe that so violent and complete was the shock of the news, that a man, who never appears to have loved life for itself, for the time being revolted from it and found existence a tyranny no longer to be endured. With his rare mental endowments, it is reasonable to suppose that, presently, he would have survived this painful experience and recovered from his disappointment in the manner of a normal man ; but he permitted himself no time. He turned to the subject of his philosophic research, and under this hard blow of fate—a fate that had always used him kindly until the present—he found in that theme no longer a mere preoccupation for thought, but an invitation to action.

THE THREE DEAD MEN

"That theme, the ever-recurring possession of his mental activity, was suicide. And the fact appears in his own handwriting a thousand times. Again and again he opens on some other subject, yet, like a phantom in the noonday, amid intelligent considerations upon love, hope, faith, honour, duty, and other subjects worthy of a high-minded and altruistic man, there creeps into the argument self-destruction. He cannot evade it; there is for him a fascination in the topic that brings him back to it again and again. It vitiates his thinking; it is a black thread woven through the fabric of his thoughts. He exhausts literature in his search for every high example and significant reference to it.

"He held with the great pagans that to live in want, dishonour or suffering was folly. He echoed Cato, Pomponius Atticus, Epicurus. We find him quoting Seneca: '*Malum est in necessitate vivere; necessitas nulla est*': that it is miserable to live in need, but there is no need so to do. He agrees with Marcus Aurelius that if the cabin smokes a wise man takes leave of it. He says with Quintilian, '*Nemo nisi sua culpa diu dolet*': no man endures suffering save through his own fault. But he is not content to justify the practice of suicide from the pagans alone; it is not enough that the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and Romans are with him and that all nations of antiquity furnish admirable and laudable examples of what in Christian eyes is generally regarded as a sin. He seeks instances through the sacred

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Jewish writings, and finds in the Apocrypha an authentic instance, when Razis, one of the elders of Jerusalem, slays himself (*2 Maccabees*), and is applauded by the historian for so doing. We find him also concerned with lights of the Christian Church—Pelagia and Sophronia, canonised for their saintly self-destruction; and of men, especially Jacques du Chastel, that bishop of Soissons who charged an army single-handed and gloriously committed *felo-de-se* for his faith. John Donne's famous apology for suicide, *Biathanatos*, he also quotes at length.

“Then, having concluded with Cicero that it is agreeable to nature in a wise man to take leave of life at its height of prosperity, he writes a learned essay on a saying from Josephus, that he who dies sooner or lives longer than he ought is equally a coward.

“With respect to Henry Slanning, then, I affirm that, after his disappointment in love, life lost its flavour and, led thereto by habit of mind and natural predisposition, he determined to destroy himself, having long convinced his reason that such an act is justified and agreeable to philosophy. We will leave the unfortunate gentleman in that resolution for a few moments and turn our attention to the other victims of the tragedy on ‘Pelican’ Estate.

“In the case of John Diggle, the night-watchman, no difficulty of character presents itself. He was a direct, single-minded man against whom nothing evil can be advanced—a

THE THREE DEAD MEN

good husband, a good parent, and a loyal and honest servant. He carried on the tradition handed to him by his grandfather and father before him, and worked with one sole purpose—the welfare of his employers. Their relation to him was closer than that of master and man. They valued him for himself, and in many ways revealed their personal regard and esteem.

"This negro's duty was to guard the sugar-cane plantations by night, and we find, in connection with that work, an old but general understanding and unwritten law, that thieves stole at their personal peril. It was not uncommon in former days for these pilfering gentlemen to lose their lives, just as a poacher, or other nocturnal robber in England, has also paid the extreme penalty. But human feeling naturally sets against such a strenuous course of action as principles of humanity gain ground. A hundred years ago the man-trap and spring-gun were sanctioned ; yet such barbaric engines are now by law swept into oblivion. So with this old pre-slave proscription ; and we may take it for granted that John Diggle would not have fired upon a thief, even under greater provocation than he was ever likely to receive from one.

"In this connection, nevertheless, we find a cloud arise on the life of John Diggle some few days before his end. Too much importance cannot be attached to this incident, since upon it hangs the whole theory about to be elaborated. We must, therefore, dwell on the statement made

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

by Mrs Diggle in Barbados. If necessary, Mrs Diggle can be further questioned, though in my judgment she has already said all that need be said.

"What does she say?

"That on a certain occasion her husband came in sad to breakfast. He denies his trouble at first; but upon his wife insisting that he is not himself, he curses the cane thieves, and says that he has got to worry about them, because Mr Henry Slanning is worrying about them. Mr Henry has told Diggle that he is falling short of his duty and forgetting how to treat the thieves.

"Immediately before the tragedy, therefore, John Diggle has been reproved for laxity in his work, and he resolves that, come what may come of it, he will obey his orders to the letter. We shall find what those orders were in a moment; and there can, I think, be little doubt that the commands issued to Diggle by Henry Slanning were of a nature that Diggle did not expect. They surprised him, and we can see how. In the first place, it was highly improbable that Slanning would bother his head about the petty pilferings of cane, or care a button concerning such a trifle; and, in the second, still more improbable that he should seek to put a stop to them by reversion to obsolete, drastic measures that he, of all men, would have been the first to censure. For so I read John Diggle's trouble, coupled with his resolve. He is going to obey, regardless of con-

THE THREE DEAD MEN

sequences ; he is going to do exactly as he is told, 'whatever happens.' He therefore apprehended that something might happen ; but he was under orders and did not attempt to shirk them, though the orders had astonished and even dismayed him.

"Leaving him also, on the threshold of the disaster, I turn to Solly Lawson and find a character that can be very fairly appreciated from the information at our disposal. This young half-caste is seen as a youth of strong animal passions, uncontrolled, but not malevolent. He was of little worth, sensual, lazy and quick-tempered ; but he had wit and a ready tongue, and—what alone matters—his attitude to his master was one of steadfast and deserved devotion. Nor does the fact that Solly would not scruple to steal cane detract from his affection for the gentlemen who have forgiven so many sins and still employed the poor fellow at the time of his death. Solly would steal Henry Slanning's cane to-day and die for him to-morrow. That dog-like trust and affection displayed by many negroes and half-castes is a part of young Lawson's nature. He has expressed to his mother a thousand times his regard for both his masters.

"What does Mrs Lawson say ? 'He dash at fings so.' Solly is ill-governed, impetuous and impulsive. For good or evil, he 'dashes at things.' And there is a still more remarkable statement recorded to the dead man's mother. Such is her son's affection for his employers that he would

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

have died for them. Much follows from this assurance; but we have to admit also that Solly had no grudge against John Diggle. Even in the event of Diggle getting him locked up, Solly would not have allowed enmity against the night-watchman to inspire him on regaining his liberty. In his mind, to repeat his mother's forcible words, 'when a fang done, it done.'

"Here, then, is the third party in this trinity of the dead, and his character stands clearly before us. Had he been different; had Diggle been different; had Henry Slanning been different, my reconstruction of the events that destroyed all three would not be feasible; but it is built upon the only foundation that remains for any superstructure—the foundation of character; and, frankly to my surprise, I find it ample for our purpose. I had suspected that any theory based on character alone must have needed modification and some special pleading when it came to details; I had anticipated the need to rely upon probability, the need to exercise no little ingenuity in rounding the narrative and gathering the tangled thread into a complete skein; I had even feared that known factors of character might presently confound me and make it impossible honestly to develop a consistent story; but, to my satisfaction, I find this is not the case. Effect, in shape of facts, follows cause, as furnished by character, directly and lucidly; motive is at last revealed, like the sun breaking from behind a cloud, and the series of events follow upon each

THE THREE DEAD MEN

other logically, inexorably. These things had to be, and they could not have fallen out otherwise.

"Henry Slanning is responsible for the entire concatenation. He designed a certain action and took elaborate means to ensure its operation ; but, the event he planned being duly accomplished, accident willed that it should serve as a prelude to other events beyond his calculations—events fatal to the second and third actors in the drama.

"Thus we arrive at the threshold of our mystery.

"When the house sleeps, Henry Slanning rises and makes his way to the plantations, choosing that region where John Diggle will be perambulating, gun on shoulder. Slanning goes of set purpose to his death. He is willing to die, but not by his own hand. It is part of his character that, while he seeks death, he cannot inflict it upon himself. He has, however, intended to do so. He has taken first steps towards that end ; and the revolver, found by his dead body, was ordered by him from Messrs Forrest, New Bond Street, London. He wrote for it a week after his great disappointment, and he duly received it, with a box of a hundred cartridges. But he could not use it. For a moment he had dreamed of so doing, when he laboured under the bitterness of his rejection. It was, however, an aberration of character that drove him to send for the weapon, and long before it reached his hand he had sufficiently returned to himself to make its use impossible.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Why, however, did he take it to the plantation empty? To make sure of John Diggle. He went out in his pyjamas, a light alpaca jacket, and a big straw hat, similar to those the negroes wear. Thus attired, in such a place, at such a time, he must naturally be mistaken for a common marauder; and having already directed Diggle to do his duty in such an event and fire at sight upon any thief, he trusted him to do so. But the revolver was an inspiration, calculated to nerve Diggle and banish the least remaining trace of hesitation. Diggle would challenge, and, if he received no reply and no surrender, would fire. How much more certainly, then, might he be expected to fire, and with how much sterner efficiency of aim, if the thief threatened him!

"Two of these three men died in the clearing of cane, where cutting was in progress; and the plans of the place show the pathway extending through it to the cliffs beyond. To the clearing goes Henry Slanning and begins to cut down cane with one of the little, familiar hatchets used for the purpose. He knows that in the silence of night the noise must soon reach Diggle's ear; and it does so. The watchman thereupon hastens to the spot, and it happens that Solly Lawson, homeward bound by the short cut through the cane, arrives a few moments afterwards.

"We may describe what follows with the eyes of Solly Lawson.

"He sees Diggle challenge, and marks a man jumps up before him. With head down, the

THE THREE DEAD MEN

robber approaches, and for answer to Diggle's demand to surrender produces a revolver and points it at the watchman. The steel flashes in the moonlight, and Diggle's response is to get in his shot first if he can. He fires and the unknown falls. Solly sees Diggle drop his gun and run forward ; but he sees more. Henry Slanning has fallen backward, away from the stroke that slew him ; his hat is off and, in the moonlight, he lies revealed. All that the dead man had so cunningly provided for and planned, Solly sees happen just as Slanning had designed it should happen ; but the advent of young Lawson is fatal to himself and Diggle.

"He has seen his dear master murdered before his eyes, and the horrible sight provokes him to instant revenge. A moment's reflection would have saved Diggle and himself, but he cannot reflect. He sees the murderer run towards the fallen man, and, fired to frenzy by the destruction of one he dearly loved, he acts on impulse, stays not a second, but seizes Diggle's gun, probably screams out some fierce words of hate, and fires at short range into the watchman's kneeling body. Then he drops the gun, runs forward, and discovers that it is John Diggle he has slain. He then flies to sound the alarm, while Diggle lies dead upon his master and their blood flows together.

"But Solly's feet grow slower and his passion abates. His fiery brain begins to work, and presently he understands the thing that he has

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

done. Is it an evil dream from which he will emerge, or can it be true that his master and John Diggle lie dead in the plantation and that he himself is a murderer? He begins to appreciate his own position. What living soul would believe that John Diggle murdered Henry Slanning? Such an event would demand proofs beyond possibility. How shall Solly's worthless word convince any man?

"One might devote pages of psycho-analysis to the meditations of Solly Lawson in his present plight; one might show how, by gradual stages, he probably wore out his wits and reached a situation of despair. But it needs an artist rather than an inquiry agent adequately to paint the picture of his horror and downfall. Had he gone home and taken counsel with his mother, some light might have fallen upon him; but this he did not do. Darker and darker became the lad's thoughts, and more hopeless the promise of the future.

"Another and abler man, or a criminal, had doubtless kept his mouth shut and gone his way, preserving his action a secret and defying his fellow-creatures ever to associate him with it; but this man was stupid, impulsive, and no criminal. I conceive that his intelligence was not equal to the strain put upon it, and that, by what train of terror we can only guess, he reached at last a conviction that he would be found guilty, sooner or later, of a double crime. His record would be against him, and there was none to

THE THREE DEAD MEN

speak a word for him. He had left Bridgetown on the previous night and walked home through the small hours ; and all he could say was that he had seen John Diggle shoot Henry Slanning and taken vengeance into his own hands. To utter such nonsense would be to stand self-condemned.

“To me the result of these reflections on Solly Lawson can be predicted with certainty. He feels, at the morning hour of lowest vitality, that it is better to die than live for what must now lie before him. By this time he has drifted back to the cliffs, for he has been walking subconsciously homeward. The sea lies beneath him, and a few moments of suffering will end all. Better to perish thus than on the gallows, with the execration of all humanity in his ears.

“Again impulse decides him. He sees not a ray of hope, but hungers to end his mental torture as swiftly as may be. Feeble now and worn out in body and mind, he dashes at his doom, designing to vanish off the earth for ever and leave no link by which he can be connected with the dead men in the plantation. He will leap down into the sea and so disappear, where none can find him. But a common instinct in suicide, to pile one death upon another, manifests itself in Solly Lawson at this supreme moment. Men often destroy themselves so ; and there is undoubtedly some subtle, psychological instinct that tends to make these double deaths less fearful to the self-destroyer. A man will drink poison

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

and then blow his brains out; or, as in the case of this ill-starred youth, he will cut his throat and leap over a precipice with his remaining strength.

"Thus did Solly act; and had he fallen, as he designed, into the depths below, no explanation of these incidents would ever have won to mortal mind; but he fell on a projection of the cliff; his body was thus recovered and his secret, as I believe, revealed, to play its intrinsic part in the larger mystery with which we are concerned.

"That, then, is what happened, in my opinion; and if it be argued that not a shadow of actual and tangible proof exists to support such a conclusion, I admit it. It is granted that I present nothing but a theory of events, and the reality makes it impossible to do more; but I repeat that the view I submit is based on character, than which no surer foundation of action can be discovered; and since these three men all do exactly what may be predicted of them, given the circumstances, it is hard, and for me impossible, to see how any other rational explanation of their death can be advanced.

"M. DUVEEN."

It remains only to add that while many accepted Duveen's conclusions, others did not, and among the latter, as he prophesied, was Amos Slanning. The West Indian held this explanation of his brother's death to be merest moonshine; though, as I explicitly learned from various Barbadian

THE THREE DEAD MEN

sources, the majority of Henry Slanning's friends and acquaintance in the West Indies believed that the matter must have so happened. At first they also protested; but when the novelty of the idea grew worn they came to believe it. The probability, in fact, increased rather than diminished.

As for Michael Duveen, he felt no shadow of doubt concerning his conclusions, and while declining the large honorarium offered to him, since it came from a client unconvinced, always held the case to be among his own purest analytical achievements.

"It is an example," he used to say, "of how motive may sometimes be unearthed through the track of character, when every other possible channel is blocked by death and cannot be explored. For my part, I have often doubted the most luminous circumstantial evidence, if opposed by radical facts of character; and though in many cases crime suddenly appears in soil of character where one would have suspected no such seed could spring, for temptation will break through the bars like a strong man armed; yet, as a general principle, if we know what an individual has been, and what forces have always guided and controlled his acts, we may safely judge as suspect any charges which openly contradict the massive proofs of his past conduct, but accept as worthy of close examination such actions as support them."

II

THE STYX

i

THE Emancipation was a two-edged sword for the West Indies, even though the hand of humanity held it. Of course every man must be free before the face of his kind, and liberty should be the birthright of all men ; but when you look at St Thomas in the Virgin Islands you see that a bygone generation had no particular cause to bless Emancipation, and you are inclined to grant that there are wrong ways of doing right. It came too suddenly, for, after all, not every white man is tuned up to the concert-pitch of freedom even to-day, and how then should the negroes make the best possible use of that blessing a hundred years ago ? Ignorance cannot be trusted with liberty.

St Thomas is among the most beautiful places on earth ; but inland, above Charlotte Amalie, where the town hangs like a necklace of rubies and pearls thrown in a triple loop on the hills, you shall find many a stately dwelling and fair garden brought to desolation and decay. Immense wealth and prosperity marked those little palaces during the olden days ; and in one of them dwelt a man famous a century and more ago. Now his strong

THE STYX

castle is a ruin, shaken by the earth tremors and hurricanes of a century. Lizards bask on the fallen pillars, and anthurium's scarlet flowers hang like drops of blood over the broken portals. A riot of tropic vegetation has turned the gardens into a jungle ; the paths have vanished ; the fountains bubble no more ; the plantations have been swallowed back into the riotous luxuriance and savage glory of primeval nature ; while the thousands of hurrying feet that laboured there are dust, and the song of the slave people is silent for ever.

But here, with a regiment of negroes to do his pleasure, once lived Captain Ben Bastion, a name forgotten to-day. He came and went from St Thomas on his fine schooner, *Night Hawk* ; and what he did with her under the horizon, or how he made his great fortune, no man knew for many a year, though doubtless not a few guessed accurately enough.

He was English, and, though a Danish island then, English continued the tongue in most mouths at St Thomas. Whence Captain Ben came none could tell ; but he arrived in his ship, took to the place, acquired two thousand acres on the hills, and soon built himself a lordly home under the crest of West Mountain—the loftiest spot in the group. He married the Baroness Annette Taaffe, a Dutch woman, and a clever lady, who administered his estates when he was away, and bore him one daughter—Nina.

A generous man was Captain Ben, and the big

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

folk of St Thomas never troubled themselves about his goings and comings, for he entertained on a grand scale, did much to benefit the island's need, and helped the Danes to increase local prosperity. And through Porto Rico and elsewhere he sang its praises, sparing no pains to develop its industries, and helping to make it the thriving port it was a century and more ago. Big ships began to call there oftener, for, in the days before steam, St Thomas proved a useful centre of call, and its snug little harbour a very present help in time of trouble during the summer months, when the big weather jumped up out of the sea, and hurricanes tore the heads off the palms and the roofs off the houses, while the island shuddered to its porphyry roots under the ocean.

As for *Night Hawk*, she only went out of commission ten years ago. A rare history had that demure little schooner—with the look of a maiden going to Sunday school. She was built in America and began life as one of the world-famous Baltimore "clippers." She proved a marvel of speed—a creature almost uncanny in her amazing swiftness and wonderful showing on all winds. That was what took Bastion, no doubt, and he must have paid the owners good money for her originally. The work she did in his time remains to be told, and, afterwards, when he was gone, she passed into the hands of the Danish Government, who made a man-o'-war cruiser of her. Then, with the coming of steam, her fighting days were done, and she became a sea postman and carried the

THE STYX

home mails from St Thomas to the neighbour islands of St John, Tortola and Santa Cruz.

Her lines were a joy to the seafaring eye, and she was pointed out as the fastest vessel in the Caribbean. But none knew much about her business, and her crew were not St Thomas men. Captain Bastion was his own skipper, and when he came ashore, *Night Hawk* generally lay off Charlotte Amalie, in the land-locked harbour, but sometimes she went round to the north side of the island, where he had a private anchorage. Nobody was ever asked to go aboard, and the port officers whose duty it was to do so never reported anything out of the common. She brought a bit of cargo with her generally, from Porto Rico or the mainland, and from time to time landed fresh treasures for Il Paradiso, as Captain Bastion called his place on the hills.

'Twas he set the fashion of flagstaffs at the town. To this day every third dwelling-house in Charlotte Amalie sports one: they spire up like a forest of white lances over the red roofs; and since St Thomas has gone to the United States and will henceforth fly Old Glory, a gorgeous vision of stars and stripes must soon flash over the glittering white walls and crown the green mountains behind them.

And now we come to Peter Paul and his distinctive race. St Thomas harbour bends like a horseshoe, and the western arm slopes down through low hills of scrub to glittering shell beaches and wondrous rocks built of live coral.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

This spot is separated from the mainland by a narrow sea-cut known as the "Styx"; and here, in a colony of their own, dwelt, and still dwell, a people called the Chah-Chahs—a pale, handsome, fair-haired folk, kind-hearted, simple, and amiable as need be. Their origin is doubtful, but some suspect that they may have descended from the yellow Caribs of old. There is, however, nothing of the savage in them. They are mild and intelligent, and capable of skill and learning. They live by fishing and plaiting of straw, and their hats and basket-work rival the products of Panama. But the sea is their element, and they prosper upon it as well as the shore. They are a fine, upstanding people, good to look at; and Peter Paul, even for a Chah-Chah, was a remarkably handsome young man, with blue eyes, a mop of bright, straw-coloured hair, a pleasant face, and a magnificent frame towering to six feet and four inches.

He had been well educated at a Moravian mission, and fishing and plaiting straw were not to his taste, for he was a man of ambitious disposition, with a great belief in his own powers. So, taking his courage in both hands, he mounted to Il Paradiso on a fine day when Captain Ben was at home, and asked to see him.

He came to Bastion after the sailor's luncheon and found him sitting in a verandah that overlooked the wonderful hill-sides, with the town sloping away to blue water beneath, and the ragged crown of West Mountain, broken by great

THE STYX

trees and capped with palms, ascending above. Upon the slopes round about were green fields of sugar-cane and banana, like emeralds set in a jewelly patchwork of forest and jungle. The land shone with a coat of many colours, its medley of tropical forest broken by silver-grey crags, by blinding light and velvety shade. Untold fullness of life gloried in the generous noon sunshine. Curtains of parasites twisted and turned and clothed the great trees. They drooped in festoons, streamed in high aerial bridges, tumbled headlong to the depths in waterfalls of leaf and flower. Everywhere reigned the same riot of bosky verdure, broken by branching palmetto and towering palm. The mango and the lime brought shining green; the bois immortelles burned with dazzling crimson—each pointed bud a spike of fire. Here hung veils of grey lichen; here, dead, golden fronds from a cabbage palm; here, gigantic cacti thrust their thorny heads to the sunlight, while agave and aloe sprawled in the undergrowth below. By shady ravines and the channels of water-courses philodendra twined and tree-ferns spread their lacy crowns. All was light and glow and colour, streaked with the flash of humming-birds and flies and butterflies, savage with the uncouth, arboreal monsters of the wood, ablaze with their sudden blossoms and fantastic fruits.

Captain Bastion sat and drank his coffee, with his little steel-grey eyes ranging over the landscape, and his weather-beaten, clean-shaven countenance relaxed for once in the bosom of his

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

family. He had a pirate face, people said—hard, stern, pugnacious. It reminded those who had seen the old buccaneers in picture of a Brasiliano or a Lollinois. None ever felt that side of Captain Ben in St Thomas; but it needed no great imagination to guess he was the hiding-place of stern forces.

Beside him sat his wife and handsome daughter—a maiden of sixteen, and the fairest of all the flowers in his garden. A bed of crotons made a background for the girl, and her delicate, pale face, with its full lips and amazing eyes, seemed to rise out of her simple white gown like a tropic flower from snow. She wore no hat, for her wealth of black hair defied the sunshine; but in it was a splash of colour, where she had set some velvety red flowers.

A fat negro in livery paddled across the piazza.

"Gem'man him call to see you, Massa—berry big man, one ob de Chah-Chah's—Marse Peter Paul."

"What the devil does a Chah-Chah want with me?"

"Perhaps he's selling hats," suggested Nina.

"Oh no, Missy. Marse Peter Paul not selling nuffin—him berry superior pusson to see de boss."

"Fire him along, then," said Bastion, and a few minutes later Peter Paul appeared, hat in hand.

"Well, my son, and what do you want?" asked Captain Ben, and as he spoke his quick eyes ran over the splendid young giant who stood before him.

THE STYX

" You look as though you ought to be good for something," he added.

But Peter Paul was already staring at Nina, and his ingenuous admiration made Bastion laugh.

" You never saw anything quite like that—did you?"

" My God ! no," answered the youngster frankly. " I never thought any lady could be so lovely."

" Good—I like honesty. That's one for you. And what d'you think of Mister Peter Paul, Chicky ? "

If the Chah-Chah could be frank, Ben's daughter appeared not much behind him.

She blushed and smiled.

" He's a splendid man, father ; and he's got a Greek face."

With a curious mixture of native simplicity and added education, the visitor spoke.

" I've learned a lot from the Moravian gentlemen, and I've a very good character. I'm pushing and ambitious, Captain. I'm much cleverer than my father, and I want to go up in the world and show how useful I could be to anybody who could trust me. I'm not a very modest person, because I feel great things might be done by me if I had the chance. I can read and write well, and cast up figures very well ; and I know all the ways of the sea. And I might rise to anything if Captain Bastion could use me."

" My word ! You've got an opinion of yourself, Peter Paul !" said Nina's mother.

" Yes, Madame Baroness, I have. I may be

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

wrong, because no man knows how high he can rise, or how low he can sink ; but I have a faithful heart and a quick brain, and I always find myself very much inclined to do to others as they do to me."

"That's wrong," said the elder lady. "You should do to others as you would have them do to you, Peter Paul."

"So they told me at the Mission, Madame Baroness ; but I haven't grasped that yet."

Captain Bastion smoked his cheroot and looked searchingly at the talking man. Peter Paul's face was bright and animated, really beautiful. He presented to the sailor's eye a piece of raw material rather beyond his experience. He was piercing under the outside and measuring the quality of intelligence behind this character.

"You'd have to work, not chatter, if you came to me," he said.

"I'll do what I'm told, if I come to you, Captain. Ashore or afloat, I obey. My good's your good, if I come to you."

"You're a rum 'un, Peter Paul. D'youth know what I think? I think if nine men out of ten, or ninety-nine out of a hundred, talked like this, I should say they were damned humbugs. But I know men, and I don't believe you mean less than you say."

"What's the good, Captain? I didn't climb up here to lie. You're very well known and not easy to deceive. You'd soon find out if I was lying. I think I'm offering you a very good, useful man—

THE STYX

a free man, born of free parents. But if I'm not a good, useful man, you'll soon find that out. And if you sent me packing in a month, you'd tell me why, so I should know more about myself after than before. And this would be all good, because the time has come for me to do man's work and help my father and mother."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty, Captain."

"Well, come. My overseer wants another chap to help him look after the people at their work."

"And if I please your overseer I please you?"

"What a penetrating devil you are! That's to say I must tell you exactly if Billy Blake takes the line with my people that I approve?"

"Yes—with your slaves."

"We don't use that word at Il Paradiso. Didn't they tell you at the Mission that there won't be any slaves in Paradise?"

"I'll call them what you tell me to call them, Captain."

"You can call them as they deserve to be called. And now you can vamose, Peter Paul. Come next Monday morning, and bring your traps. You'll have a room in the compound, and take your meals with Mr Blake and the other two. What money d'you want?"

"I'll work for three months for my keep, and let you fix my salary at the end of that time, if you please."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"You reckon you'll come for three months, then?"

"I reckon so, Captain."

"All right. Will you have a drink?"

"No, thank you. I go now very fast indeed to tell my parents of my wonderful good fortune."

"And they'll tell you not to count your chickens before they're hatched, my son. Show Peter Paul the way down through the woods, Nina. It will save him two miles, and he's in a hurry."

"I will long remember your kindness, Miss Bastion," said Peter Paul, as the girl rose to obey her father. "It is a great thing to have seen loveliness and heard wisdom in one hour."

When man and maid had vanished down the bright slope of the garden, the Baroness spoke to her husband.

"D'you think he's quite right in his head?" she asked.

"I bet about level money that he is. I may be wrong, and if he's cracked, Blake will soon find it out; but if he's not, then he may be something rather good. His education sits on him like a clumsy garment; but the man, if sane, is uncommon stuff."

"You'd better ask about him at the Mission."

"No, that's to handicap him—or handicap me. I've got no use for the Mission. I'll hear what Blake has to say after my next trip."

The woman sighed.

"The next and the next and the next, and never the last," she said.

THE STYX

He looked down at his schooner, lying at her moorings on the north side of the harbour. *Night Hawk* slept with folded wings in a lonely bay, beyond which little islets basked in the ineffable blue of the Caribbean. Round each grey or golden rock broke a ribbon of pearly surf.

"The last comes nearer," he said. "I'm tired of it. I'll finish and refit in a year or so; then we'll make her a yacht, and I'll take you and Nina for a look at Europe."

"I don't want a look at Europe. I want a look at you—a long look, not glimpses, broken by absence and care and haunting fears."

Her daughter returned, and the mother was silent. The girl laughed and flung herself into her father's arms.

"He's a dear!" she said.

"Dear at any price, perhaps. D'you think he's cracked?"

"Cracked'? No, father! He's got a beautiful mind. How could he help it with such a face? I don't believe he's a Chah-Chah at all. I believe he's one of the Greek gods come to life again."

"I'm afraid he's a prig. The missionaries turn out terrible prigs, you know."

"He's not a prig. I don't believe he's particularly good, and I'm sure he's not bad either. He's quite unlike other people."

"That's what your mother says."

But Nina would not allow the criticism in any unfavourable sense.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"I can't explain; but I feel he is rather fine and wonderful," she declared.

Peter Paul was quickly forgotten, for Captain Ben sailed before morning. At midnight he went his way through woods where the fire-flies danced and the tree-frogs purred aloft. Then to the lonely landing-stage he came, and his kit was tumbled into a boat that waited for him. He wore a uniform now—the dress of the merchant mariner of the time.

When dawn came, and Annette Bastion, from habit, looked at the sea, the islets glittered in their morning bath of light and the waters stretched in dazzling planes of turquoise and gold. But *Night Hawk* had taken wing.

ii

Peter Paul came up on a donkey at the appointed day. Beside him walked a negro, who guided a second donkey which carried his luggage. There was not much.

He entered upon his duties immediately, and first puzzled Mr Billy Blake and then pleased him.

"Most young men ask the reason why and do what they're told afterwards," he explained; "but this chap does what he's told first and, if he wants to know, asks why when the thing's done."

Peter Paul found the slaves at Il Paradiso a contented, cheerful company, and Blake was able to say of the new clerk that he possessed unusual cleverness and application. He had ideas too,

THE STYX

and showed a keen, loyal instinct from the first. But though he had learned much before Bastion's return, the Captain still found Peter Paul unsophisticated. His simplicity had indeed developed an unexpected danger in one direction.

There were great changes in the air at that time, for England had already abolished the Slave Trade by Act of Parliament, and America was about to do the same. A traffic, that had long been regarded with doubtful eyes, promised soon to become criminal, though the status of existing slaves would not be thereby affected. Public opinion was still far from ripe for any such revolutionary move as Emancipation.

Captain Ben found that the new clerk echoed Blake's sentiments on all subjects, and perceived that the young man could be trusted. He promised to prove of very real value. But then, after a longer absence than usual, the master returned to find tragedy awaiting him, for his daughter Nina had fallen in love with Peter Paul.

The thing sprang up like a hurricane in their hearts without a doubt, and for some time her mother failed to discover the event. Nor could she be blamed. A handsome, sociable woman with many friends, the Baroness went her own way, and, regarding Nina as still a child, left her much in the company of a French governess and a widowed woman who had been her nurse. She refused to perceive her daughter was full-fledged, and in any case the gulf fixed between Nina and the handsome Chah-Chah was so

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

profound that Annette Bastion never dreamed of such a possibility as love bridging it.

The little French governess was the first to hear of Nina's dream, and being of a romantic mind and ignorant of Peter Paul's humble origin, she felt no need to break her promise of secrecy ; but the flame leapt apace and Peter Paul's prayers to Nina for delay were overborne at last.

They were fiery young things in a fiery world, and Nina's soul went out to Peter Paul, for he came as a revelation of reality and woke her into living, breathing worship. His voice was a new music, his words a new wisdom, the knowledge that he loved her a comprehensive, all-absorbing fact that made every lesser thing a dream and a shadow. He stood out against the background of her young days as the very incarnation of hope and joy. Without him, a life that seemed merely colourless, looked back upon, appeared impossible by anticipation. To live without him would be living death, in her opinion ; but she considered his entreaties to keep the secret for six months, until Peter Paul's wonderful virtues had impressed themselves upon her father.

"He likes me very well, and trusts me, and I rise quickly as you know," said Peter Paul ; "but love blinds you ; you think everybody must see me with your eyes. Of course they cannot do that. The Captain will be much hurt, and banish me, and drive me out of Paradise with a flaming sword. The thing must seem terrifically impossible to him for a long time yet."

THE STYX

"He cares much for me—and if it is a choice for me between my Greek god and death, he will not hesitate," vowed Nina. Love had made her adorable; but she was very young and passion soon began to cloud her judgment. When first he kissed her she had fainted, to his great terror; yet Nina laughed at his fear when she recovered and found him holding her in his arms, and dabbing her forehead with a handkerchief dipped in a fountain.

All too soon her mother learned the truth from Mary Giddens, Nina's nurse. She was a Scot and well educated.

"It will be 'Romeo and Juliet' with our young lady and Mr Peter Paul if you don't do something," she said; "they are about together a deal too much, and Missy's talking of him in her sleep."

When Captain Ben came home, therefore, after a lengthened cruise, he heard the trouble, and was just reckoning how to cast loose on the clerk when Peter Paul, reluctantly enough, broke the news himself. For he had more reasoning power than the little girl, and guessed correctly at what her father would say to him.

Nina did not know that her mother was already in her secret, and the Baroness, feeling unequal to immediate action, said nothing until she got her husband home again. Then Ben was quite bowled over by the story, and knowing Nina, guessed that he stood faced with a stern duty. He was furiously angry with Peter Paul, and angry with himself also for making such a

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

miscalculation of character. He prided himself on knowing men; but he forgot that men and boys are not of the same value, and that a lad of twenty is often still a coefficient without its factor. Indeed Peter Paul now came out very unexpectedly as a quantity still unknown and, while daring to ask for Nina's hand, showed himself to possess qualities for which Captain Ben had not bargained.

Peter Paul's method of setting out the romance was extraordinary, of course. He displayed such dignity about it that Bastion's anger gradually changed to a sort of sulky respect. But it did not alter his tune.

A hot night it was, with a smell of hurricane in the air, and the overseer's clerk, clad in spotless white, loomed into the red aurole of a lamp set on a little table on Bastion's marble piazza. He came by appointment and found his master alone.

"When you've said your say, I've got a word for your ear too. Fire away, Chah-Chah Paul," said Ben. "I'm listening."

"So's God, Captain; and I hope He'll help me to say this properly. It is that your daughter, Miss Nina, and I, your clerk, are in love. I should not have told you this great event, Captain, because I know it must come upon you as grotesque and outside what you have a right to expect from life. Life has no right to serve you in this way. I should have waited for a year—perhaps two—but you cannot keep a lady waiting if she does not want to wait. Miss Nina has found herself in such love with me that to wait

THE STYX

a year would be a grief to her, and so the great virtues I should have shown you are still hidden in my character. In two years you would have said 'yes' to this; because by that time you would have felt that I was worthy of this huge honour and uplifting. But six months—it is too little. I told her that by asking for all I should lose all. But she thinks that her life is of the first consequence in your eyes, and believes that if I go away her life is ended. Love is a perilous thing, and I am very sorry this has happened, because, without doubt, it will change all my future career. And my wonders would have extended into the married state, Captain. I should have been a very good husband."

"I daresay you would, Peter Paul, but not for my daughter," answered Bastion. "You've got to remember this: Nina has hardly seen a dozen men in her life. She is utterly inexperienced. For her to marry you, or anybody, before she's been to America and Europe, and had a look at the civilised world, would be ridiculous. You see I treat you reasonably, which is more than some fathers would do, Peter Paul. Just think—a man of your race, with nothing in the world but the cheek of the devil, to court his master's only daughter! You are proud of your wits; but they cannot be very first-class, I'm afraid, if they didn't tell you that you were doing a right-down damned silly thing when you looked twice at her, or did more than answer when she condescended to speak."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"All most true, Captain Bastion. I take all the blame. But I much hate to be thought damned silly, and you must not blame my wits. My wits have done nothing that I am ashamed of. My wits stood and looked on."

"When the love's in the wit's out, so perhaps you're right. But now you can challenge your wits again and see what they'll tell you about this nonsense."

"I have done so," answered Peter Paul. "When measuring what I should say to you, I turned on my wits like a lamp, and they showed——"

"They showed you the way out of Il Paradiso. That's why you pitched your yarn so tame, I'll wager."

"They did," confessed Peter Paul; "they showed me out, Captain."

"I never thought I was letting the serpent into Paradise when I gave you a show, my fine chap. However, that's about the size of it. You're altogether too high and mighty to quarrel with, so I'll treat you like a gentleman, and merely say this can't happen anyhow. It's less likely than a frost in the tropics. So pack your traps to-night and see Blake in the morning, and get your money, and go down the hill first thing to-morrow. I'll explain to Nina that she mustn't dream of any such tomfoolery, and trust her good sense to come to the rescue as soon as may be."

Peter Paul was silent for half-a-minute before he replied.

THE STYX

"You feel you have thought enough about it, Captain?" he asked mildly.

"Yes, I do—quite enough; and if I think more about it I may say things you'd like still less to hear and do things you'd smart to feel. Clear out before I get savage, and if you want a character I can give you a good one—for any master without a silly daughter."

"I shall now die a bachelor, Captain. Be gentle with Miss Nina—always remember it was not her fault. Will you shake my hand before I go, or would you rather not do that?"

"You beat me—never saw or heard anything like you before—never want to again. There—shake—now clear."

"You deny me to take leave of Miss Nina to-morrow?"

"Yes, I do. That's quite needless. I'll talk to her."

Peter Paul bowed and went out. His tall, graceful figure moved like a ghost into the darkness and he was gone.

The next morning Bastion had to face an outraged Blake.

"The best man that ever came here, or ever will, bar myself," he said. "And now you've dismissed him. What for?"

"Had to, old son; he wanted to marry my girl," explained Captain Ben. "Sorry, but what could I do? You must draw the line somewhere."

Billy Blake, of course, calmed down before this outrageous fact.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"I suppose you must—all the same the woman who marries that amazing young man will have a masterpiece for a husband. I don't know where he came from, but I know where's he's going to, and that's up top. He's a marvel at figures—and the trouble he takes! The capacity for hard work in a man of his age—is a caution. Nothing will stop him."

"Well, he's gone; and I've got to face my girl. He confessed it was all his fault, and no doubt it was. I suppose she'd bowl over most boys of twenty."

"And he'd bowl over most girls of sixteen," answered Blake. "I don't take much stock in good looks, as you know, but he's the finest thing in man's flesh and bones ever I saw in my sixty years."

Then the Captain, who never postponed an unpleasant duty, went straight to Nina and suffered an exceedingly stormy hour with the maiden. For the first time in his life, as he told Annette afterwards, he was frightened. The girl shrank first at his words, as though a flower were creeping back into its bud. She looked at him and listened quietly at first; but when, encouraged by her silence, he took a mistaken line and blamed Peter Paul for trying to turn her head, Nina expanded again and blazed into passion, and showed him something he had never seen before. He came to talk to a silly girl and found a fierce, indignant woman. Everything about Nina was changed—her expression, the light in her eye, the tone of

THE STYX

her voice, her gestures. All were exaggerated and intensified. She scorched her father and she defied him. But she began calmly enough.

"I am your slave with the rest," she said ; "you can do what you like with me; but you cannot keep me alive if I want to die. And know this very clearly, father, when Peter Paul takes the blame on himself he lies for love of me. It was not his fault that I was drawn to him by invisible cords of fire. It was not his fault that I haunted him, and lay in wait for him, and put tasks upon him. He told me in plain words that I must not seek him and he dare not be my friend. But I made him my friend, because I knew that I loved him as never a girl loved a man before. I can only love Peter Paul in the world—as my mother, when she was a girl, could only love you in the world; and if I do not marry him I shall fade away and die like the English roses. That is how I feel, and I will not be angry till you speak again."

He did speak again. He made her come and sit on his lap, and fondled her, and talked gently to her about reason and self-control and her pride and her position. He explained that Peter Paul was a man of peculiar race—a man bred of simple, sea-going folk—who had raised himself by education to be a useful and respectable member of society, but no equal in any fashion for Nina. And then she slipped away and stood in front of him and scorned him.

" You, that I thought was as far above smallness as the sun, to say these things ! You, who know

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

what love is, to say these things! You, who understand men so well, not to see he is a king among men! I am wiser. Love does not blind—that is false. Love shows the truth. It is a faithful guide. I was blind till I met him; and then life rose up out of the twilight into the full day, and I knew why I was born, and came out of my chrysalis, and spread my wings for him, for him, for him! And then he knew that he was born too. But a bit of the chrysalis stuck to him and he was frightened, and said, ‘Wait, wait till your wise father sees I am not a common man, but worthy of great trust.’ And I said, ‘Father knows that—he is never wrong—and I cannot wait—I cannot wait!’ And he obeyed me and spoke; and now he knows I thought too well of you, for you are mean and small and have no eyes.”

“Steady, Nina, my humming-bird!”

Still he did not take her quite seriously. “By God! she’s lovely in a rage!” thought he.

“Mean and small,” she echoed. “And if you and mother can do this—then you never knew what love was.”

He listened quietly and rather liked to see her put up such a fine fight; to resist her temper was easy, but to deny her tears more difficult. They came presently, and she abased herself and knelt to him. That hurt him worst, but it made the man angry too.

“Hell!” he said. “Don’t let me see my daughter on her knees to a man—even though it’s her father. Curse if you like, and call down

THE STYX

all the powers of darkness on my head ; but don't cringe, don't eat humble pie, Nina. This thing can't be and shan't be ; and a year hence you'll very likely want to go on your knees again—to thank me for preventing it."

She got up then and stood off from him as grandly as a tragedy queen and prophetess combined.

"Then hear this," she said—she was quite quiet again now, though the shiver of past tears shook her voice yet. "May God punish you and bring you to the dust, where you've made me kneel—kneel for nothing ! And He will, because you are doing the vilest deed that ever you have done in your life—the worst and wickedest deed. And it won't be forgotten ; and when the punishment comes—remember you deserved it, father."

"All right, my dear. I'll give you all the credit ; and meantime try to think better of me and go on with your life and develop a bit of Bastion pluck and common sense. And don't think I'm made of flint and steel. I haven't forgotten what it was to love, Nina ; and I haven't forgotten what it was to love the wrong one either. I thought once I had found the only woman in the world, but—no matter—I lived to know I was mistaken and thanked God I was free when your mother hove in sight. Maybe you'll tell the same story some day."

"I shall not change. I may die, but I shan't change. It is only men who change."

"Leave it at that, then," he said. "Don't die—

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

look forward, and see where we all are, and what we're all thinking and feeling a year hence."

Before he sailed again Bastion bade his wife have close care for Nina, distract her mind as well as she might, and inquire, when opportunity offered, what Peter Paul was doing with himself.

"I hope he'll go back to his own people," said the Baroness; "then he'll drop out of sight and we shall see him some day catching fish, or on a ship. Perhaps after that Nina will understand where her infatuation would have led."

But Captain Ben apprehended no such thing.

"He won't sink to catching fish. There's a cast-iron, calm assurance of power in the beggar and a determination to succeed that I can appreciate more than most, because I had it myself at his age. I'll look his way again, when this foolery has blown over, and see if I can get him a job at Porto Rico perhaps."

iii

Beyond the colony of Chah-Chahs the western arm of St Thomas Bay shelves through tangled underwoods to a shining strand. The shore is composed of sun-bleached coral and myriads of shells. One seems to walk a fabled land whose earth is made of jewels. Clear as liquid beryl, the sea comes rippling in, with golden sunshine caught upon every wavelet. Pink cowries, "green pea" shells, conchies and other bright things twinkle under foot, and where the rocks jut into

THE STYX

the water it is possible to sit and mark strange, manifold life in the crystal beneath.

Two beings were so employed, and the dark curls of the one and the golden hair of the other came close together as they surveyed the wonders below. There swam strange fishes and crawled echini with black and white and crimson spines. The skeletons of similar sea-hedgehogs littered the beach. Live coral, brown in colour, lifted little submarine forests and grew like masses of sponge upon the rocks. Dark corallina dwelt under the water also—an order of creation whose fantastic metamorphosis no living man yet knew or dreamed. This branching coralline, studded with polypi and attached to a submarine rock, produced, first by budding and then by transverse division, an armada of monstrous jelly-fishes ; and these, in their turn, laid eggs, from which swimming animalcules were hatched, to fix on rocks and develop into branching corallines again.

But this amazing cycle awaited the genius of a Darwin to discover. Nina and Peter Paul guessed not at that and many other wonders in the water beneath them. They were concerned with their own miracle—the miracle of a love that laughed at all lesser things, and was to prove stronger—so they believed—than the forces that wit of man and cruelty of life could bring against it.

She had grown quiet and apparently resigned before her father sailed again ; but the resignation

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

was pretended, that no restrictions should be put upon her actions. Her mother, judging that amusements would best serve to make the girl forget, sought them for her, took her more than usual into the company of her friends and gave her as much money as she wanted for toys and gowns.

Nina played up to this situation, and there is no doubt that Peter Paul aided and abetted. He was now at home, but they established a lovers' post office on Il Paradiso's boundaries, and he spent a good many nocturnal hours in going to and coming from the sacred spot. There once indeed they met on a night of fire-flies, when the Baroness was at a Government Ball and Nina should have been in bed.

And to-day, though her mother imagined her with girl friends at Charlotte Amalie, Nina was spending a glorious, but mournful, afternoon with Peter Paul. Into the wild wood behind the beach they went presently and he talked.

"Since what we feel is altogether undying, then it cannot die," he said. "But it is worse for you than me, because you have to wait and be patient; I have to fight and make great victories and come again before your father as a conqueror. One cannot conquer in a minute. The sad thing is he could not see that I must conquer, soon or late. I have found good work. It is a stepping-stone, but the first steps are slow: the strides come afterwards. I begin next Monday at the West Bay Sugar Factory."

THE STYX

"My mother tells me that my father talks of finding you a good post in Porto Rico."

"It is majestically kind of him to think of such a thing ; but I cannot accept benefits from him, Nina. There is only one benefit that I will accept from Captain Bastion, and that must be Nina Bastion, his daughter."

"He will never say 'yes.' He is hard and horrible when he makes up his mind."

"It depends. The world is full of surprises," answered Peter Paul, little guessing how terrific a surprise that night would see. "I'm a hopeful man, Nina ; all men of great promise are hopeful. But if the surprise, when it comes, is not for us, then it will be for him. And if I do not presently get enough power to come before him as a conqueror, yet it is quite certain that I shall soon get enough power to run away with you and so come before him as a husband. But that will disappoint him sadly in me. We have the faith that moves mountains, and the mountains will move as easily as the earthquake moves them. An earthquake is not stronger than our united wills."

She believed him with her whole soul.

"And I shall do my part," she said. "You can trust me. I am strong and cunning ; and though I have no genius like you, Peter Paul, I am a clever girl in everything to do with love. If we must run away, we must."

They walked to a little knoll where grew frangipanni and cacti and huge aloes. It was a haunt of amorous negroes, and many of the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

aloes bore initials cut upon them, circled with hearts and lovers' knots. Peter Paul picked a little cluster of odorous bloom from a frangipanni's gaunt and naked branch.

"It is like our love," she said—"fragrant and delicious, though it puts forth its beauty with no leaf to shelter and no kind foliage on the parent bough. It is complete in itself."

At that moment a wonderful thing happened. Peter Paul was listening to her, with his blue eyes on the distant sea, when suddenly they hardened and became fixed.

"Look!" he said. "Your father's ship is coming in!"

"Impossible, dearest heart. He will not be home for a month yet," she answered.

"There is no ship like his. She is in full sail and—"

He broke off, for he had seen more.

Nina looked where he directed and marked a schooner that certainly resembled *Night Hawk* under full press of canvas. Sails and hull were black against the sunset, for now it was the evening hour and the west began to blaze with wonderful colours that flamed over the sky, gleamed in broad sheets of splendour upon the sea, and made Charlotte Amalie glow along the hill-sides like a fairy city built of precious stones.

"That is indeed father, and I must fly. I did not know the evening had come, for it is always noontide when I am with you," said Nina.

He saw her on her way, but did not accompany

THE STYX

her far, for his mind was full of trouble and fear. He had marked what Captain Ben's daughter did not observe—two men-of-war with all sail set behind the flying *Night Hawk*. He judged them to be American battleships, but could not be sure of that. Deeply experienced in the ways of the sea, he understood very well that the frigates were in chase of *Night Hawk*, and they had so manœuvred that she could not dodge them without coming under their fire. Attack she evidently meant to avoid, and she was now heading straight for St Thomas, to make the port after dark. Once bottled there, Captain Ben's ship was lost ; for the pursuers would anchor outside till morning and doubtless patrol the narrow mouth of the harbour through the night, if they did not instantly man their boats and board her.

The afterglow flung its fleeting glory over sea and land and the swift darkness of the tropics descended while Peter Paul watched. He could just discern the schooner enter the bay as usual, furl sail and reach her moorings ; but it was already dark, and bright stars shone out of the purple overhead. The watcher, every sense alert, strained his eyes and ears to seaward and heard the rattle of chain cable outside the harbour, where *Night Hawk*'s pursuers presently cast anchor, their prize secure. Then, hastening to the inlet of the sea beside his home, Peter Paul got into a skiff and pulled cautiously to the harbour. It happened to be very empty of craft that night, and he knew the authorities would

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

not board the incoming ship till next day, even if she were reported. In all probability neither she nor the men-of-war had been seen under the fast-falling night. But whether *Night Hawk's* capture would be postponed till daylight he could not tell.

Peter Paul paddled out until he saw the dim shapes of two big frigates anchored half-a-mile apart outside the heads, and marked their riding lights. They lay off the harbour mouth ; and at the actual entrance, which was little more than a quarter of a mile across, he heard the steady ring of rowlocks and saw that a patrol had been set. *Night Hawk* was doomed, it seemed, but would not meet her fate till morning. Yet, that being so, Peter Paul believed that he might save her. He did not pause to consider the right or wrong of it. He did not trouble about the fact that Captain Ben had evidently been caught red-handed in evil and was now about to suffer just punishment and eternal disgrace. He only knew that Nina's father stood in the extremity of peril, and that the moment had come, at last, when his assurances of great gifts might be made good to vital purpose. Heart and soul he was affirmed to save Captain Ben, and he believed the miracle might be performed.

Now he turned his boat shoreward and presently came alongside *Night Hawk*, where she lay in darkness. A low hum, as of a mighty hornets' nest, ascended from within her, and it told Peter Paul all that he needed to know.

THE STYX

The deck was manned and a look-out, marking the skiff, told Peter Paul to sheer off. But he came alongside and declared that he brought very urgent messages for Captain Ben Bastion from shore.

"Tell him Peter Paul wants to see him, and say that Peter Paul knows a way."

He waited for some time, and his heart sank, for a white man spoke over the side and told him the skipper was locked up in his cabin and would not allow anybody entrance.

"He's told us all to go ashore and save ourselves," whispered the man, "and some want to go, but most want to sink or swim with him. Will they try to cut us out to-night?"

"No," said Peter Paul. "They have set patrols across the harbour mouth, and they won't board you till dawn—for the sake of your cargo."

Then came a sailor with good news. The Captain would see his visitor, so Peter Paul went aboard at once and was led aft, where Captain Ben had his cabin in a deck-house. The blinds were drawn over the windows, and at a table sat Bastion under a swinging lamp. Before him were papers, letters and a revolver. He was unshaven and haggard. His coat was off, and he wore only a singlet and a pair of trousers.

"Don't keep me," he said. "I've got some letters to write yet before morning. The pitcher has gone to the well once too often, my son. They surprised me in cargo, and when I wouldn't stop, made chase, and I couldn't slip them—

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

they're the fast cruiser frigates, and we're heavy just now."

"Niggers, Captain?"

The other nodded.

"We've got over a thousand under hatches."

"What does she draw? Be sure you tell me right? Everything depends on that."

"Fifteen feet, I daresay."

"No more, Captain?"

"No more, that's sure."

"Thank God — then I can get you out of this."

Bastion shook his head.

"They'll patrol the mouth."

"But not the 'Styx'—not the 'Styx'! I know the 'Styx' like my right hand. It can be done."

"I should only pile her up, boy."

"You would, but I shall not. I can scrape her through. I know what I'm telling you is the truth. It can be done with great skill and nerve. The tide's good at two o'clock to-morrow morning. Get your anchor in an hour and tow her in with muffled oars. I know every turn and twist of the 'Styx,' I tell you, and your ship can crawl through as sure as I'm speaking."

Captain Ben looked at Peter Paul and saw a man as much in earnest as himself.

"I was going to finish it to-night," he said, glancing at the revolver. "Not because I care, but because of my wife and child. I'm better dead than locked up—for their sakes. And I'd have sunk the old *Hawk* too, but for her cargo."

THE STYX

"Trust me—that's all. You shall show them a clean pair of heels if you'll only trust."

"I can't think there's enough water there, my son."

"Nobody thinks so. If they did, maybe they'd have brought up the bottom before now. But I know. Depth and breadth just suffice."

The skipper sent for his mate and the man proved incredulous.

"The 'Styx'!" he said; "that cut in the West Bay? Why, I thought a man could pretty well wade it."

"So think many," explained Peter Paul. "In old years, knowing no better, the authorities blocked it up altogether. Then St Thomas Bay grew foul and stagnant, and everybody began to die of yellow fever. So they broke it out again, that the tide should flow according to nature's plan and keep the Bay sweet. The sides shelve, but in the middle there's enough water, and the only shoal is seventeen feet at high tide. We can get over and we can get through."

"It's neck or nothing," said Captain Ben's mate, "and if what this man says is true, we may slip them. If it isn't, then we're hung for a sheep instead of a lamb—and lose the ship. But all's one if we're taken."

Peter Paul waited in deep concern until a decision was made. He drew a plan of the "Styx" for them and convinced them it was just possible to get *Night Hawk* through if all went right. Satisfied that his living cargo could not

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

be lost in any case, Captain Ben decided, shut up his desk and papers, pulled on his coat and came on deck.

He told the crew what he intended to attempt and none questioned him, though many believed it madness. A thousand Africans were having their evening meal when the schooner, towed by two of her own boats, crept west. Like a ghost she went, and the men pulled with muffled oars very slowly. It was a moonless night, and through a sea like black glass, that flashed with phosphorescent fire, *Night Hawk* crept to her ordeal. A hundred yards from the channel she stopped for the top of the tide; then, with Peter Paul in the chains under the bowsprit and the boats pulling ahead, she crept in, like a cat on her toes. Beneath decks was the murmur of a thousand souls; forward stood Captain Ben. But life or death for the slaver depended not on him; his ship and himself were in the hands of a lad hanging over the sea beneath him. The boats just moved and kept way on the schooner; from either side out of the shelving darkness came the ripple of water breaking on the stone banks of the cut. Once a boat crossed at right angles in front of them, and a Chah-Chah, paddling home, nearly had a fit at the sight of a great ship in the "Styx." But Peter Paul, knowing the man, hailed him, told him to keep his mouth shut concerning what he saw, and promised a generous reward to-morrow.

Foot by foot through a nocturnal century, as

THE STYX

it seemed to Bastion, his ship crawled forward. Once she touched and shivered like a frightened horse; but it was only a touch. She floated and moved on. Peter Paul's directions were issued clearly and sharply. He spoke low, but his voice travelled to the boats, and at every second dip of the oars beneath him he guided their movements to a fraction. Captain Ben, even in his profound anxiety, marvelled that a landsman could thus handle a ship and display such nerve and seamanship in a hazard so extreme. For himself, he felt that he was the living, suffering soul of *Night Hawk*. He moved in spirit under the sea with her and breasted the darkness with her forefoot. He had shuddered when she scraped the rock and felt his own bosom torn. He panted, sweated, groaned at the interminable ordeal, for it seemed that they would never be through. "When I am dead and ferrying with Charon to Hades, that Styx will be child's play to this," he thought. But the cut was traversed at last. The slaver was safe in an hour and once more rode in deep water with the open sea ahead. They had to tow her another half-mile to catch the off-shore wind. There was little of it, but it would freshen before dawn.

Night Hawk's saviour had enjoyed a brief and private interview with Captain Ben before he left the ship and paddled back to the Chah-Chahs' fishing creek. He was inspired to the last on that memorable night, and when Bastion proclaimed his purpose of writing to his wife and

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

sending the letter by Peter Paul, he advised against any such action.

"Let there be nothing in writing—even to the Baroness—to show this is not all a dream," he said. "They may not have seen you from Il Paradiso, for they did not expect you. There will come a time when the battleships will say they chased you into St Thomas. But they are mistaken; everybody is mistaken. You know nothing of it. You were far away upon your lawful occasions. They chased somebody else—*The Flying Dutchman*, perhaps. That is best."

Captain Ben took his hand. The elder was a little unsteady, for he had suffered from the ordeal.

"Get into your skiff and be off," he said. "We're beginning to move, and I don't want to lay to again. I shall be back in a month. And when you see us in the Bay, come up to Il Paradiso sharp."

"Not so," answered Peter Paul. "How should I know you would permit me to come? I shall not have seen you since you dismissed me. You will send a servant bidding me present myself before you; and I will then do so."

Under all canvas, *Night Hawk* stole away to the west, and was hull-down in the neighbourhood of Culebra Island before the look-out on the warships reported her disappearance. The miracle had been performed, and when a rosy fore-glow broke the east, and every eye of the watch turned to mark their prey, her low, black hull and sweet spars were not to be seen. It was as though *Night*

THE STYX

Hawk had indeed taken wing, for only by way of air did it appear possible that she could have escaped. Peter Paul stood on the coral beach at dawn with a cigarette in his mouth and one of his mother's hats on his head. He heard the shrill of the bo'sun's whistle and saw the man-of-war's boats set out. But there was neither inlet nor creek where the object of their search could hide.

So the men of the battleships told of their adventure and cursed their luck. A few ashore believed they had seen *Night Hawk* arrive, but it was clear they had been mistaken. The authorities offered the American men-of-war excellent entertainment but little sympathy.

And the sight of the "Styx" threw no light upon the mystery, for even by day it looked doubtful if a whale-boat could have run the channel in safety. The possibility of a ship going through by night never occurred to anybody.

A week later Peter Paul saw Nina again. He was quite as puzzled as other people.

"Strange things have happened on the sea," he said. "What we saw was without doubt a mirage. The Lord works His wonders upon land and water alike. But what is much more to us has also happened, for, since we met on the coral beach, I have had a good dream—a shining dream. There came a spirit bidding me hope all things. I am indeed very happy about the time to come, Nina."

Then Peter Paul took up his new work at a

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

sugar factory, and accomplished it so admirably that when, a month later, he gave notice his new employers were concerned, and asked why he had changed his mind so soon.

"It is because I return to the Captain at Il Paradiso," he explained. "Captain Ben has decided that I am a man of valuable parts and worthy in every way. There are private reasons also why I should go to Il Paradiso, which will appear in fullness of time."

The Baroness first thought her husband mad ; yet joy and sorrow came to her at a breath, and the joy overmastered the grief, so that presently the grief faded and she was content.

For when Bastion returned, and *Night Hawk*—innocent as a little child—crept to her moorings, his work was done.

"I'm through," he said. "Never again. The game's outside the law now, and I'm too old to monkey with the law. She shall be your yacht if you like, and if you don't want her, I'll sell her to the Government. She ought to be useful as a slave-catcher with her turn of speed."

"I never want to see her again as long as I live," declared the lady.

That was the joy for Annette Bastion ; the sorrow came when she heard that Peter Paul was to return and be accepted as Nina's future husband.

But even that she could not very deeply regret when the reason reached her ear. For Captain Ben had no secrets from his wife. There came

THE STYX

a day when he told her all. As for Nina's lover, he never again mentioned the subject of *Night Hawk's* escape even to Bastion. He was marvellous in his circumspection; and when, in private, Captain Ben desired to retrace every moment of that tremendous night, his future son-in-law seemed puzzled.

"Be sure it was a freak of fancy, Captain," said Peter Paul. "Indeed everybody who understands the sea will tell you *Night Hawk* could not go through the 'Styx.' Beyond question, you have dreamed this thing."

The wedding occasioned much comment, but it proved a very brilliant success, and the prosperity of Il Paradiso reached high-water mark during the years that followed it.

Nina and Peter Paul went on their wedding tour to Europe; yet were they well pleased to return home again. They reigned on West Mountain when her parents passed, and Peter Paul entered local politics and proved indeed the leader in St Thomas for a generation.

The only child of the marriage—a boy—went into the American Navy, for he was his grandfather over again and loved salt water.

As an elderly man he stood beside Mahan many a long year afterwards, when that great admiral first cast anchor in St Thomas Bay and declared the island a naval base vital for strategic purposes to the United States.

III

LILY'S STOCKING

i

THE lofty chambers of the sugar mill were streaked and splashed with sunshine ; they blazed with bright garments, where the coolies hurried to and fro ; and overhead whirred wheels from which endless bands descended. Iron galleries to right and left vibrated with the thunder of great engines, and snowy puffs of steam jetted aloft and below, while on the ground yawned huge vats, and the hot air reeked with the smell of molasses and coco-nut oil. Through the sound of machinery one might hear the slow, steady crunching of the sugar-cane as it was dragged between great rollers ; and one might see the grey juice spurting out in a sweet Niagara, to be caught anon and sent overhead through pipes to the sulphur boxes.

For sugar passes through as many stages of purification as a Buddhist's soul. From cleansing to cleansing it goes, through boiling vats, fiery lakes, and other torments, till its consummation is attained and the white crystals glitter into being.

This West Indian factory at St Joseph, Trinidad, was an irregular building with bright roofs of corrugated iron. It stood on a plain beneath high

LILY'S STOCKING

hills, and drawn to it by the loud-mouthed hooters, shouting impatiently for more cane, there streamed wagons from the plantations round about. They were drawn by yokes of dun-coloured oxen—mighty, soft-eyed incarnations of patience and strength. With ponderous gait they lumbered along the dazzling roads, led by little negroes whose woolly heads scarce reached to their dewlaps.

A great moving ribbon of iron drew the cane into the factory; while upon the other side of the works a similar band rolled out again carrying with it the "megasse," crushed cane from which the treasure had been extracted.

Not far distant stood a solid stone house, and at the door under an awning sat Andrew MacAndrew himself—manager of the "Savannah" Sugar Factories.

He was clad in white; he scratched thoughtfully at the red scrub of a short beard, and his face was stern. But his expression, thus cast into sobriety and a sort of restless discontent, really belied Mr MacAndrew. An old half-caste stood beside him, and with a short axe split up some samples of sugar-cane.

"Dey come from de east plantations, marse," he said.

MacAndrew nodded, and examined the cane. Ravages had been committed upon it by the "borer"—an insect pest from which few cane lands are wholly free. The parasite showed in a red stain blotting and streaking the pith.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"D'you find much of it, Ned?"

"No, marse, only in bottom corner. De borer he no busy berry much."

"That's to the good. We knock off on Thursday next week for Christmas, I suppose. It's nothing to the coolies, but they like their holiday as well as the niggers."

"Ebbrybody like holiday, marse!"

It was not old Ned Landon who spoke, but a young, full-blooded negro, who passed at the moment and heard the chief.

He grinned, and marched on his way.

"You'll soon be having a longer holiday than you want, Samson, if you cheek me," shouted MacAndrew after him.

"Lazy debbles, de niggers," said Ned. "If dey only took larn from de coolies. But nobody nebber teach no nigger de dignity ob labour, sar."

The main work of the sugar mills was done by coolies from Bombay. They signed on for a specified time, toiled steadily, saved their money, and in course of years returned to their own country. The lines of their habitations ran outside the mills to the left, while to the right dwelt the cattle. The East Indians, regarding themselves as in every way superior to the negroes, treated "Quashie" as an inferior being in all respects.

Ned Landon spoke of the young man who had just passed.

"You must send dat Samson away, else you must send my son, Benjamin, away. Dey bitter enemies, because dey fall in lub wid same gal."

LILY'S STOCKING

"Good powers! Ned, are we to lose a useful boy for that? Your Benjamin is about the best hand we've got on the farm, and though I told that rogue Samson I'd sack him some day, he knows very well he's safe. Nobody manages the bullocks better."

"Samson bad boy—Ben good boy," summed up Ned. "Samson, he black nigger—Ben, like me, he white." For Ned prided himself on being far removed from the Ethiop, and saw his own chocolate features many shades fairer than could anybody else. "And boff de boys after Lily Smiff," he concluded.

"There are such a lot of Lily Smiths. Surely they could each find one?"

Landon grinned. "Dare's only one Lily for dem boys, marse. And she de Lily dat's yo lady's nursemaid."

"Our Lily! My wife wouldn't part with her for fifty Samsons or Benjamins either. She's a treasure; my children love her—for that matter, she's a child herself."

"She old enough to hab sweetheart, marse. She know berry well de young men run after her."

"Nonsense, Ned."

As he spoke a youthful negress came to the door to seek him, a happy, coal-black maiden with crisp, shiny hair, and a neat, slim figure. Her feet were bare, and she wore spotless white, with a turban that had once been crimson, but now was dulled to an old-rose colour.

"Dinner ready, sar," she said.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"What's all this nonsense about Benjamin and Samson, Lily?" asked the overseer. His face was always stern, his voice always a little truculent; but the people knew Andrew MacAndrew's heart and were quick to read the twinkle in his eyes under their ragged eyebrows. Negroes and coolies alike only feared him when they were in the wrong. At other times they treated him as good children treat their parents. He enjoyed their confidence and their respect, but they felt no fear of him unless a reason existed to do so.

Lily laughed, and showed her teeth.

"I fink bof want to marry me, sar."

"How old are you?"

"Tirteen, sar."

"I doubt it. I believe you are only ten."

"Wish I may die, marse, if I no tirteen."

"Well, you're not going to leave the missis for years and years yet; I would be ashamed of you if you thought of such a thing.

"I nebber go from de ma'am, sar. She make me a berry good gal. Dey nice gem'men—Marse Ben an' Marse Samson; but Marse Samson, he talk plenty—Marse Ben, he nebber open his mouf."

"Because he too wise to make silly chatter," explained Ben's father.

"Well, you steer clear of them."

"An' you mind dis, Lily: dat Samson, he bad man," warned Ned. "He black—black; my Ben, he white man, like me."

"He no tongue in him head, Marse Landon,"

LILY'S STOCKING

answered Lily. "Marse Samson, he not feared ob gals; but Marse Ben, he look at me wif his eyes berry like he eat me."

"Don't be a little fool," said the overseer, and went his way to his wife.

Jennie MacAndrew was full of the coming Christmas, for she strove mightily to keep up the old traditions, and display them to the wonder and admiration of Trinidad friends, in the strange land where her fate had led her, and where her two little boys, Alec and Leslie, had been born. The present problem was to find a shrub that would look like a Christmas tree; for though the MacAndrew babes, aged three and two respectively, were hardly of an age to appreciate such an entertainment, Jennie held the rite must be celebrated.

"They may have something at the Botanical Gardens in Port of Spain," she said. "Lily's uncle works there, and she is going in on Sunday, and shall ask him if he can send us a little tree of some sort."

"Your Lily's got the boys after her," announced Andrew, sitting down to a Muscovy duck and yam.

"Nonsense, Andy. At her age! I won't have anything of that sort, for she's much too precious in the nursery."

"There's safety in numbers. She's divided between two—Samson and Ned's son, Ben."

"I won't have it," declared Mrs MacAndrew firmly. "She's a very valuable little person to me, and the babies adore her."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

ii

When Sunday came, Lily Smith, surrendering her two little red-haired charges to their mother, went off to Port of Spain. Her escort proved to be Samson. He was attired in a very striking pair of lavender trousers, and wore a hard hat and a red tie. Lily wore white as usual, and carried a pink parasol, which was her joy. She rose on Sundays to the splendour of yellow shoes and stockings, and wore them to-day, though in secret she hated the discomfort of them.

"Catch the six o'clock train back to St Joseph," said Mrs MacAndrew, "and show your uncle the picture of the Christmas tree, and beg him, if he can, to send me something like it. If he's got anything that will do, Mr MacAndrew will call for it in a day or two."

Samson made gallant love to Lily all the way to Port of Spain, and redoubled his ardour when they walked presently through the wonders of the Gardens. Here little bamboo aqueducts carried life to right and left, and insects, birds and reptiles seemed to share the business of the place. Lizards as large as squirrels ran along the paths and climbed the trees; crickets maintained an endless chirrup; large and brilliant butterflies danced through the blazing glades and opened and shut their wings on flowers as gaudy as themselves. The *Qu'est ce qu'il dit?*—a black and yellow bird nearly as large as a thrush—put his eternal question from branch or bough, and humming-birds and

LILY'S STOCKING

blue-birds and golden king-birds flashed through the groves, or hovered before the blossoms. Here were mountain roses, bay-rum trees, oil palms, "cannon-ball" trees, nutmegs, rose-apples and betel-nuts, the last a little palm of exquisite grace. Elsewhere pine-apples began to flower in cones of purple blossoms, and beneath the trails and curtains of epiphytical or scandent plants, that hung their stars and streamers from the arms of greater trees, lay beds of Eucharis lilies, brakes of stephanotis, and the flash of oranges bending the boughs that bore them. Fan palms spread their great disks above beds of crotons, so blindingly brilliant that they made strange eyes ache at their flame and fire; and here and there rose the cooling murmur of fountains.

"You a damn fine gal, an' I'se gwine to marry you, Miss Lily," said Samson. He twirled his malacca cane round and round, and made the most of his height, for he was tall for a negro, stood six feet, and gloried in his exceptional stature.

"I no hurry to marry, Marse Samson," she said. "I berry happy gal wid ma'am an' de piccaninnies."

"Udder people's piccaninnies nuffin," declared Marse Samson. "We hab our own piccaninnies —three, four, five boys and gals."

"Marse Benjamin—him want to marry me too."

"Him dare!" said Samson.

He poured out a volley of alarming threats as to what Benjamin might expect if he made love to Lily, then he broke off and laughed very loudly.

"But I no mind him; he 'fraid ob his own tongue.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

He nebber brave enough to tell a booful gal he lub her."

Lily kept her thoughts to herself. At the bottom of her heart she preferred Ben's more peaceful methods and the intervals of silence in his love-making. She dearly liked to talk also, and with Ben it was enough that she did so, while he listened and looked at her out of his wonderful eyes. Samson, on the other hand, preferred to do the talking and be looked at.

A moment later and they came upon Benjamin himself. He sat alone on a garden seat and drew in the sand with his cane. He, too, was in Sunday attire, but looked a dowdy bird contrasted with the brilliant Samson.

"My!" cried Lily, delighted to see him. "Dare Marse Ben all alone!"

"Tell of de debble an' you see him," said Samson; while Benjamin rose, grinned nervously, produced a half-caste substitute for a blush, and took off his hat to Lily.

"We no want you, Marse Ben," said Samson decidedly. "I walk out Miss Smiff to-day. So you go 'way, sar."

But Lily objected.

"You no go 'way," she said. "I berry pleased to see Marse Ben. We all go togedder an' have somfin' to drink. It terrible hot to-day."

Hot though it was, Lily's temperature had yet to rise, for Samson resented Ben's company with all his might. He was a peppery negro, and brooked no criticism or interference—at any rate

LILY'S STOCKING

from his equals. Now he did the quarrelling, and made a great many offensive remarks. But Ben, strong in the consciousness of Lily's support, hung on, walked upon one side of her while Samson towered on the other, and did not attempt to answer the bigger man's insults.

"Yo' a damn imperent nigger, sar," summed up Samson; and at last Ben was fired into speech.

"I no nigger, sar, an' you damn imperent for call me 'nigger.' I'se white gem'man."

This was a bold assumption, for it needed a trained eye to discriminate between their shades of duskiness; but Lily supported Benjamin, after his rival had exhibited much noisy amusement at the claim.

"Marse Ben berry nearly white gem'man," she declared judiciously, "an' you berry rude man to laugh, Marse Samson."

"She no' promise to marry you yet," argued Ben mildly; "so you no business to talk to me so sharp. If she let me go along wif her, dat her arrangement."

"Den she better say which man she want den," growled Samson.

"Yo' bof berry nice," declared Lily. "And I like yo' bof."

"Dat no good," explained Ben. "You may like us bof, Missy Smiff, but you no lub us bof. So dar it am."

Lily was a coquette to her shining shoes, and enjoyed this scene immensely; but she began to feel a measure of alarm, and strove to steer a

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

middle course. She enjoyed Samson's rage, and she enjoyed Ben's calm obstinacy ; but the former soon brought things to a climax.

"We no' chatter no more," he said. "I no' waste no more words on dis pusson. An' if you want him, den say so, an' I nebber speak to you again, Lily Smiff, till him out de way ; an' if you hab de sense to want me, den say so, an' I tell dis poor creature to clear out and nebber come in yo' sight no more."

Lily's voice rose into a whining sing-song.

"You no go courting in dat nasty way, Marse Samson. You berry wild, fierce man dis afternoon."

"De gal must take her time an' fink if she lub you better'n me, or if she lub me better'n you," explained Benjamin.

"Dar nuffin to fink about," answered his rival. "Lily know very well yo' a poor fing—no good to a fine gal like her."

They wrangled on ; then Miss Smith had an inspiration.

"Marse Samson, he asked me to marry him four times," she said ; "an' Marse Ben, he no ask me to marry him once yet."

"Because I decent pusson. I come to it slow, like a nice man."

"Bah !" said Samson. "You like old frog. You sit an' wait for de gal to jump down your froat!"

"I'll do dis," declared Lily. "Kissmas Day soon come, an' de first ob you dat ask me to marry him on Kissmas Day, I say 'yes,' so dar now !"

LILY'S STOCKING

Both were silent before such a tremendous promise. Even Samson did not speak immediately.

"Dat how it is," she continued. "I no say no more. So now you bof know. De first dat speaks on Kissmas Day, I lub him and marry him sometime. Now I go 'way to my Uncle Pete. And I no want to see you gem'men any more to-day. I no pleased wif eider ob you."

She left them standing still together, walked off down an avenue to a gardener's cottage, and disappeared. Samson cast a few words only at Benjamin.

"All fair in lub, you mind dat!" he said darkly. "De damn gal no' see what you are. But I speak first on Kissmas Day, an' if you push yo'self forward, I berry like kill you, sar."

Then he stalked off, and Ben sat down again presently and considered the tremendous situation.

iii

Before she returned home that night, Lily felt that she had made a great mistake. There remained, of course, the excitement of Christmas Day to anticipate, and the glorious doubt of what Ben and Samson might do in the meantime; but it was the sequel that made Lily anxious, because now she felt quite sure that she loved Benjamin, and that his rival was out of the question.

"I nebber hear myself voice wif dat Samson," thought Lily, "an' he berry rough, an' he lord it ober me; but Marse Ben, he kind and no' make so much noise, an' gib me better time."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

The suitors also occupied their thoughts entirely with the problem, and according to their natures, so they prepared to act. Benjamin imagined no more daring deed than to fling stones against Lily's shuttered window at the first peep of dawn, when Christmas morning broke; but Samson took a more devious and diplomatic view. He had dark thoughts, so dark that they frightened him; for though Quashie will talk very large and threaten all imaginable devilries, his words are seldom translated into action. The average West Indian negro is lazy, amiable and good for little; but he seldom rises or descends to crime. For practical wickedness the silent East Indians far surpass him. And when the black vultures crowd over a cane brake, or gather on some lonely hill, it is the murdered carcass of a coolie man or faithless woman that attracts them.

The "John Crows"—the vulture scavengers of Trinidad—were hopping now in a gutter, and regarding Benjamin with their glittering eyes as, deep in thought, he walked through the compounds of the sugar mill. That Lily seriously considered him a suitor was to the good, but she evidently felt very open-minded about him. Lily could not be in love with him yet if Samson attracted her equally. In fact, she did not seem to care which won her. Ben puzzled a good deal at this attitude. It was somewhat bleak, as contrasted with his own wealth of emotion; but he assured himself that love on Lily's side might

LILY'S STOCKING

soon waken from the mighty love on his. She was very young, and if she once accepted him, he felt sanguine that he would be able to waken genuine passion in her breast. Thus he reflected while on his way to yoke a pair of humped oxen to a wain; and meantime Samson was loafing in the factory. He stood before a great vessel, hermetically sealed, where the juice of the cane bubbled and boiled *in vacuo*, while the sugar crystals were born and flashed through the roaring liquid. Samson looked into a plate-glass window at the strange process taking place within but his mind was not with what he saw. He had indeed, no business inside the mills. He was standing there all alone, with his hands in the pockets of his ragged working trousers, and his thoughts entirely occupied in tremendous plots to circumvent Benjamin.

The problem for Samson was not represented by anything so mild as a dawn visit to Lily on Christmas Day. Ben would think of that: it was obvious, and so, doubtless, a fool like Ben would fasten on it. But Samson took a wider range. How if Ben were prevented from appearing before Lily? Supposing that by some craft or stratagem Samson were able to suppress his rival on Christmas morning? Then all would go well for him: and Lily's word once given, she could not fail to keep it. Samson was full of admiration at himself for planning anything so masterly.

"I'se too clebber!" he thought.

But he had yet to find that a great idea is

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

vain without the means to express it in terms of reality.

He was still pondering and staring at the sugar crystals when Ned Landon came that way and told him to begone.

"You no business in de works, Samson, so just you bundle out ob here, an' no come again," he said. "Whar my son Ben? I send for him and he no' come."

Ned, who was in a hurry, hastened past the negro and proceeded to the yard, and then, as it happened, Benjamin, who had received his father's message, entered the mill by another door and so missed him. Hearing that Ned was already gone to seek him, Ben then turned to follow his father, and so overtook Samson, who was just walking out of the works.

They had not met since their Sunday collision at Port of Spain, and the younger Landon wanted no words now. He was slipping past Samson on a narrow gangway which ran beside the open vats of molasses when the bigger man addressed him.

"If you fink you speak first on Kissmas marnin', you make big mistake, so you better makeudder arrangements, you man."

"We see 'bout dat."

"Yes, we do see 'bout dat. An' if I find you near de gal, I gib you good beating, so now!"

"You all talk. Nobody care what you say, 'cause dey know it all wind."

"Me all wind! Take care, Marse Ben, or I grab yo' pants an' fling you in de molasses!"

LILY'S STOCKING

Then Marse Samson did a very vulgar and outrageous thing, for he deliberately spat in Benjamin's face. The insulted negro roared, lost his temper, rushed at Samson, and closed. They banged their heads together with a sickening thud, and Ben put his white teeth in Samson's ear, while the big man retorted by pulling out a lock of his enemy's wool.

The noise brought half-a-dozen coolies running to the spot; but they dared not intervene, for there was great danger. A yard to the right of the struggling men opened a vat of boiling molasses. Then came Ben's father back again, and for a moment he did not recognise that his son was one of the couple on the cauldron's brink.

"Stop! stop! you damn niggers!" he bawled. "Oh, me Gord! If you fall in dar, you spoil a hogshead sugar and hundreds jars ob treacle!"

That Samson or Ben, or both, would also be horribly boiled to death in five seconds did not trouble Ned so much. But for the moment the fighters were seeing red, and each was far too mad to consider his peril. Not until one had fallen to his knees on the very edge of the vat did Ned and a big coolie reach them. Then Landon perceived that it was his own son who tottered on the brink of destruction, and while the coolie got his hands round Samson's neck to choke him off, Ned dragged Ben out of peril. He was, however, too late to save him entirely. A naked foot had descended as far as the molasses, and though in

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

the boiling mass half-a-second only, was terribly scalded.

"Me dead man—me gone dead!" screamed Benjamin. "Me foot—him fall off! Me foot no mend no more!"

Then Samson, dazed and bleeding from his ear, was driven out of the mills; and Ned, chattering wildly, half carried the hopping and weeping Benjamin away. MacAndrew's buggy stood outside, and in three minutes the injured man, with his foot swathed in a lump of cotton-wool, was driven off to the doctor.

iv

Samson told his friends that but for the united efforts of twenty coolies he would certainly have hurled Benjamin to horrible death in the treacle vat; while as for the victim, he found himself committed to the care of his mother, and to the assurance that he must not expect to put his foot to the ground for a month.

Samson, victorious and conscious that his rival would certainly not be the first to see Lily on Christmas Day, felt only anxious now that he might escape the law; but though he received a very serious reprimand, nothing more came of it, save that he was ordered to perform Ben's tale of work as well as his own. He proposed to do Lily the compliment of calling upon her before she should be up on Christmas morning, for the nursery window at the overseer's house was familiar to him. It faced north, and might be approached from the garden.

LILY'S STOCKING

If one had looked into that nursery on Christmas Eve a pleasant sight had greeted the spectator, for there lay two little red heads, one on each side of a curly black one. Each MacAndrew babe had his cot by Lily's bed, and a stocking hung from the foot of all three couches.

Then, at midnight, came Santa Claus, in the shape of Mrs MacAndrew. The night lamp showed her the way; and though the shrub from Pete at the Botanical Gardens proved a burlesque of what a Christmas tree should be, she was determined that the solemn rites of Christmas Eve must at least be well and faithfully observed. Quiet as a mouse she loaded the stockings hanging from the cots of Alec and Leslie; then she turned to Lily's, smiled as she looked at the little sleeping negress, and slipped certain Christmas treasures into hers also.

Among them was a letter directed in a very large, round hand. And Santa Claus put that at the top.

When Samson came along before daybreak, the stars were still shining, for there is no dawn at Trinidad. The false Southern Cross flashed undimmed; the true Southern Cross lay low on the horizon. Then the east was flushed with rose, and day leapt upon night and annihilated it as the sun climbed aloft through golden bars.

"A merry Kissmas, Lily!" said Samson.
"How's you dis marnin'?"

"A merry Kissmas, Marse Samson, an' I plenty well."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"An' you marry me, Lily, 'cause you keep yo' word, an' I here de first."

"I guess not, Marse Samson. You come too late, sar."

"How dat den? Ben, him sick in bed. You know dat berry well, Lily. You keep yo' word, or you a wicked gal an' de debble get you!"

"I keep my word sure, Marse Samson. It like dis: Marse Santa Claus, him come when me an' de piccaninnies all go sleep; an' he put Kissmas presents in de stockings we hang up; an' de first ting in my stocking dis marnin' war a booful letter from Marse Ben, asking for me to marry him. So dare you are. Because him first, an' I lub him; an' I no lub you a mite, sar."

Lily had taken her troubles to Mrs MacAndrew, and she, visiting the luckless Ben, turned his sorrow into joy, explained the latent possibilities of Santa Claus, and did not leave him until his proposal was in her pocket. She had also bargained that Lily must never dream of marrying until Alec and Leslie returned to their native land in two years' time.

So Lily waved her letter at the speechless Samson.

"Den I kill you bof! I kill you bof, Lily Smiff! You no' marry me—you no' marry nobody. An' I wish you good-mornin', you damn gal!"

"You go to church, Marse Samson, an' pray Gord to forgib you, 'cause you such a horrid nigger," she screamed after him.

LILY'S STOCKING

The Cape jasmine in the overseer's little garden was very sweet, but the English roses, though they flowered in shady places, had lost their fragrance in their tropic home. Then the sun ascended, and with it came a "pride o' the morning" shower in great fleeting drops, that flashed like jewels as they fell. Westward, painted on a purple cloud, wide in arc, blazed a span of prismatic glory, and beyond it, on mightier arch, with vaster circumference, hung the ghost of another rainbow greater than the first. Wooded mountains and valleys and far-flung savannahs glowed with light.

Samson shook his fists, and Lily laughed at him. Alec and Leslie also laughed very heartily—not at the frantic negro, but because good things had happened to them, and laughter was music proper to Christmas Morning.

IV

RED TOOTH

WHEN I think upon the day that I heard this story, a smell comes into my nostrils, a sound into my ears, a scene before my eyes. The smell is burning bone and the voice that of a man ; while for the rest, I conjure up a dazzling white beach under tropic sunshine, a blue glimpse of sea with a steamer lying at anchor upon it, a wharf of stone and timber, and negroes going and coming. Along the sandy beach, coco-nut palms with ragged fronds range close, shoulder to shoulder, and beneath them the shade is purple and silky.

I was sitting on a fallen palm log, I remember, while in front of me lay two dozen unhappy reptiles, belly upward—a catch of turtles presently to be conveyed aboard the steamer lying off harbour. They were being branded on their yellow undershells with the shipper's mark ; and upon the odour of the smoking horn there wakes again the fantastic vision of the boy with the branding-iron.

The niggers came and went, shouting orders to each other and doing as little as might be. Some brought a sort of ambulance to convey the unfortunate turtles to the boats ; others were

RED TOOTH

busy with copra and coco-nuts. Then slouched along an elderly man with a couple of green nuts, for the heat was tremendous and my thirst lively. Ned Bloom — the boatswain of the coasting steamer that had brought me to Tobago—was a grey, time-worn merchant sailor with whom I had made friends. Now he sliced off the head of the great nuts and revealed in each more than half-a-pint of colourless liquid. Inside the shell was a thin layer of white cream, that would in time have thickened to the kernel.

"A drop from your flask, master, and the drink's brewed," he assured me.

"Who's that youngster, Ned?" I asked, pointing to the lad with the branding-iron.

"Ah! You've marked him? Most interesting Quashie in Tobago, though he's not more than seventeen year old. A white nigger—a freak of nature you may say, for the Lord loves variety, and he gets tired of the putty-coloured, treacle-coloured, butter-coloured half-castes sometimes and gives you a thing like that. That's Pete, that is. A perfect sample of a white nig. And he's more wonderful than he looks—far!"

Bloom regarded the singular youth with such frank admiration that I guessed he might be Pete's father; but this was not the case. The lad had been an orphan as long as he could remember. He was fairer than many Englishmen, with crisp wool the colour of uncarded hemp, grey eyes, a body well-knit, and cast in more sturdy mould below the waist than is common

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

among West Indian negroes. But negro he was in every other respect. He had the sloping forehead, flat nose and blubber lips of the Ethiopian. His mouth, however, was not flabby, and he made no great display of ivory save when he grinned. He displayed character, and his voice, when he shouted for another hot iron, revealed more depth and decision than the usual whining negro intonation.

"His father was a white, no doubt, and his mother a full-blooded negress," said Bloom. "The chap was shipmates with me once; now he's working for a Scot on this island; and such is the cleverness and character of him that he's bound to succeed, and will be a prosperous nigger by the time he's twenty. But 'twas neck or nothing once. He's been through a bit, and looked death in the eyeball and showed himself as white inside as out. In fact there's mighty little nigger in him. 'Tis only the shape of his face bones and a few odd marks on his body, and wool for hair that Pete got from his dam. You'll hear most people call him 'Red Tooth,' by the way—not Pete."

"Why 'Red Tooth,' Ned? His teeth are white enough."

"Yes—no man ever had whiter. But that's the story. They'll be half-an-hour yet afore the boat's loaded. I'll tell it if you mind to hear."

He drank off his coco-nut milk fortified from my flask, flung away the shell, drew out his pipe and tobacco, and told his yarn.

RED TOOTH

"Did you mark, between St Vincent and Grenada, a scattered row of little islands and islets—some no more than rocks? The Grenadines they call 'em. People live on some. Carriacou and Cannouan and Bequia have villages of niggers. But for the most part they are just a broken ridge of scorched rocks thrusting out of the Caribbean—barren and desolate. Nought alive but a brown pelican ever sets foot on 'em, and they're as lonely as the North Pole all the year round. But they look fine, specially at sunset time, for then they burn against the dark blue water as if they were red-hot, and the very surf that breaks on 'em is like a necklace of fire. And one—just a tall snag two hundred feet high—lies away by itself, five sea miles and maybe more from its nearest neighbour.

"It's got a name—the same as a precipice in Grenada that overhangs the sea. Le Morne de Sauteurs it's called—for why? Because when civilisation came to the yellow Caribs, with a lie on her lips and a smile on her face, and a scourge hid behind her back—which is the way she generally do come to the savage—she fooled the local folk with false promises; and once she got her foot in among 'em she soon showed the poor creatures their number was up. They believed all she said and took her gifts—her fire-water and her looking-glasses, and her other triumphs of civilisation; and then, when it was too late, saw the trap and tried to save themselves. But the French had got their grip on by then and held

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

the coast, and had fire-arms. They fought mighty well, did these yellow Caribs—even against gunpowder—and died fighting through Grenada and the islets. And the last of 'em, hemmed in on every side, took their death leap from the crags to the sea, reckoning Nature to be kinder than the French. So their jumping-off places got that name. But I'm telling of the lone islet, stranded like a ship off the main run of the Grenadines ; because it have won a new name since those days, and for the last five year on these seas, and for many a year to come, it will be called ' Red Tooth.'

"Very like a red fang it looks at break of day or sundown—just a giant dog tooth, stuck there stark with the sea rolling round ; and 'twas a seafaring man gave it that name—as bad and wicked a man as ever sailed the Spanish Main since them buccaneer devils in the spacious times of Drake and Hawkins.

"Barlow he was called—Burke Barlow—a hairy, mongrel chap, half Irish, half 'Che-che.' He'd got a little top-sail schooner of his own, and he traded through the Southern Islands, his port being Barbados. He'd work in cane and coco-nut, arrowroot and cocoa, and bitumen from Trinidad, up and down, same as we do ; but he was pretty well hated by black, white and brindled all through the islands, and he often found 'twas as much as he could do to get chaps to sign on for a voyage. Because the fame of him ran before and behind, like a stink, and sailormen gave him a wide berth if they were plain dealers.

RED TOOTH

"But Barlow liked the bad 'uns, and as there's always a few bad 'uns knocking about Bim,¹ he didn't sail short-handed very often. For he had a fine scent for a scoundrel. By the same token he got me. I lost my job on a Royal Mail Packet through drinking too early in the morning—God forgive me—and I was at a loose end, down on the careenage, one noon, when Burke Barlow came along and grabbed me for a voyage down to Tobago and back. I knew nought of him, and signed on as seaman, and told him 'twas a mighty long time since I'd been on a sailing ship. Then his mate came along and we had a drink, and being in a cussing mood, through losing my job, I said many wicked things against this world and the next, and pleased Barlow very well.

"His mate was another such as him—a fair wrong 'un, size him up how you pleased. Jacko Ward he was called—English—a lean-faced, hook-nosed man with blue eyes like a jackdaw, long and loose-built, and the foulest tongue I ever met at sea. He was ten year younger than the skipper, but true as steel to him.

"That man remained a mystery to me to the end, for he seemed to be right down evil for no reason. Even the devils I reckon have a reason for their wickedness; but blessed if Jacko had any. What his past might have been, Lord knows, but, along with Barlow, he made good money, and had it very much his own way on the ship. He'd got a wife in a hole somewhere

¹ Bim—Barbados.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

at Bridgetown, and there didn't seem nothing to make him such an inhuman wretch ; but that he was ; for he had a bias, and as other men will die for drink, or ruin themselves over women, or gambling, Jacko Ward's pleasure in life was cruelty, and he won far more joy from inflicting misery and pain than you and me would get from a champagne supper, or a barrel-load of diamonds.

" He ought to have been drowned when he was born, for the creature that goes about using its lusts to torture other people is better underground than on it. But there he was, mate of Burke Barlow's coaster ; and Barlow cared more for Jacko than he did for anything on earth. A pair of 'em—blackguards both—who had run up against each other in the welter of the world, and never meant to part no more till the Grey Dustman came for 'em. If there was anything to admire about 'em 'twas their cast-iron friendship ; but with such men even that was horrible, for they cleaved together because evil was their good, and what they admired in each other was their wicked hearts and devilish ways. Men who know about 'em wondered which was the worst ; and for my part, speaking without heat, but cold as a judge, I should have said if there was a pin to choose in infamy, Jacko had it.

" The schooner was called *El Santo Rosario* ! But there wasn't much of the Holy Rosary about her, I'm thinking, and never vessel, great or small, had a name that fitted her so ill.

RED TOOTH

"For crew there were three dagos; Paul Park, a mulatto carpenter; Wilkins, a white; myself, and a cabin-boy—yonder lad branding the turtle. Pete wasn't much above thirteen year old that voyage, and making his first trip with Barlow—his first and last. From Tobago he'd come, and I soon found that he was only waiting to get back there to bolt.

"For the poor little wretch, owing to some deep reasons hid in the make of the man, had woke up Jacko Ward's love of torture to a proper burning rage; and he made a science of his cruelties, for not content with tormenting the body, he had wit enough to skin a man's soul alive with his tongue. That I soon found, for he was full of brains, though the thinking parts of Jacko had gone sour for ever, long before I fell in with him.

"And only three days on earth did I have of his company, as things fell out; though that was three too many.

"In the case of the white nigger, Ward didn't trouble about torturing his soul, reckoning, as a good many do after long contact with them, that niggers have no more souls than monkeys. 'Twas Pete's body Jacko tormented. He loved to see the funny mark a rope-end left upon his skin, or a fist on his face.

"Pete was a landlubber naturally, for he'd never been to sea before, but he was a lot above boy average—quick, plucky, willing—and if he'd been left to find his sea-legs and treated as a human

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

being, he'd have minded his pigeon well enough. He was teachable, and had his white father's cleverness ; for whoever the man was, 'tis certain he owned to character and spirit beyond what belongs to many blacks. In truth, the boy would have been a success afloat, as he has since proved himself ashore ; but he never had a dog's chance from the first.

"Wilkins, the second mate, told me about it, when I grumbled at Jacko behind his back first day out from Barbados.

"'He's got a down on him,' he said. 'There's always one or other he gets on to like that. 'Twas a dago last time ; now it's this white nigger. He likes to see blood run, that man. There's a lot of brute tiger in him. He gets hungry and thirsty to be hunting something from time to time. Then he goes mad and beats the devil. He's been at this nipper ever since he came aboard ; and you can't do nothing, because the old man's his side, and nought Jacko does is wrong.'

"Well, I bided my time, and counted presently, when I'd got my footing aboard, to talk to the mate and try and put the fear o' God in him if possible—or the fear of me, God failing. We went to St Vincent first, with home stores, and took a lot of arrowroot ; and then it was that I saw Pete show the first spark of what lay hid in him.

"We were getting stuff out of a lighter and Pete was minding his job right enough when he let his end of a case slip. No harm was done,

RED·TOOTH

but Jacko judged it too good a chance to miss, and he turned and kicked the boy good and hard on his naked shin-bone. That's the softest spot of a nigger's carcass by all accounts, and Pete rolled over in agony and twisted about on the deck. One groan he gave, but no more; then he picked himself up and went over to Ward, who had been feeding his jackdaw eyes on the sight.

"'Yo' treat me dat way any more, Marse Jacko, an' I kill you—'fore God I kill yo', sar!' says Pete. He was quite quiet. He didn't scream or whine it out; but just said it clear and straight. Then he went back to his work.

"And after we had up anchor and away, Burke Barlow, who'd heard the tale, sent for Pete and told him 'twas mutiny. Then he fetched him out and made the dagos trice him up, and told Ward to give him a dozen.

"I was full up with the *Holy Rosary* by now, and for two pins would have knocked them ruffians' heads together and took the consequences; but I judged it better to lie low till I got to Trinidad. Then I meant going to Government House and laying a charge of cruelty against Ward, if not the skipper.

"In the fo'c'sle that night me and Paul Park medicined Pete's back, and I told the boy I was his side, and would see right done as soon as I could. But he answered nought. He took his dozen very well, but was weak after it, and I gave him a good drop of rum from my private bottle.

"It seemed Ward had worked off his cruelty

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

for the minute, and next day he steered clear of the boy ; but at evening time, off the Grenadines, he was on to him again, and seeing Pete slop over a drop from a full bucket as he came out of the cook's galley, he caught him a wipe across the face with the back of his hand.

"Pete flinched away ; then he went to the side and emptied the bucket, and was returning, when Jacko barred the way.

"'Go forrad, you dog !' he said. 'I'll teach you to make faces at me.'

"'Twas a favourite trick of Jacko's to send a man forrad and kick him behind as he went.

"But he never gave no more commands to nobody. Pete kept his word. He dropped the bucket, pulled a knife out of its sheath at his waist, and jumped for Ward like a wild cat. Quick as lightning he done it—far quicker than I'm telling you. We saw the bucket go down and the knife go up and the boy leapt at Jacko all in a moment. And before the mate could side-step him he'd got home and drove his blade, with all his weight behind it, through the man's neck. The wretch went down like a log with the boy on top of him. Pete was up again in a second ; but his tormentor never got up no more. He was unconscious from the moment the knife cut through his jugular and stuck in his neck-bone. A proper old shambles it was, and by the time Barlow ran up, his pal was a goner.

"Skipper, he said very little, but told us to put Pete in irons, and ordained I was to take Ward's

RED TOOTH

place as first mate. Then he bade us swab the deck and went aft and stopped there very still for a bit.

"The wind, I remember, died with the sun, and we were becalmed. There was the stain of the dead man's blood alongside, and it hung on to us and brought half-a-hundred sharks, great and small, nosing round the ship. Easterly stretched the Grenadines, burning red-hot out of the still sea, and their foam collars were gone, because there weren't a breath to break a wave on 'em.

"Barlow, marking the sharks, sent for Chips—the mulatto, Paul Park—as the sun was going down, and bade him make a coffin.

"'Jacko ain't going over the side,' he said. 'I don't want the sea creatures to eat him. And to-morrow we'll take him to "Red Tooth"—that rock sticking up to port.' He pointed to the lone islet, towering all by itself, like a lighthouse.

"'There's a bit of a beach there,' he said. 'We'll bury the man there to-morrow.'

"Well, Paul Park set to his work, and that night was heard the rum sound of an undertaker's hammer aboard a ship. Paul was quite proud of his work, and he told me as he never did a stroke with greater pleasure, for he'd had his dose of Jacko too, in the past, and there weren't no tears shed aboard *El Santo Rosario* that night, unless the old man shed 'em.

"I took his supper to him myself when the time came, because Pete was otherwise engaged, and I asked Barlow if I might give the boy some

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

food. He nodded, but said nought, nor did he come on deck again that day.

"In the fo'c'sle we talked, for there was nothing to do more'n keep a watch. We'd cast anchor and lay becalmed under the stars, with ribbons of phosphorescent light streaking our water-line. I'd seen Pete and found him quite cheerful.

"'Dey no hang me, marse,' he said, "'cos I too young for dat.'

"I dressed him down, of course, and told him he'd done a terrible wicked thing and deserved to be hung anyway; but he didn't see it.

"'I tolle de gem'man what I do if he treat me so bad, an' I hope him in hell dis ebening, sar.'

"Burke Barlow had the dead man put in his coffin at dawn, and lent a hand himself. He was very quiet; but you couldn't see much what moved in his mind at any time, because his face was three parts a bush of brown hair, and only his nose and eyes poked out of it.

"The calm held and he ordered the boat out after breakfast. First he had the coffin lowered into it, and then two dagos and Wilkins manned the boat.

"After that was done Barlow spoke to me.

"'Fetch up that murdering boy,' he said. 'He can help to dig. And you're in command till I come aboard again.'

"He gave me the key of the irons and I loosed Pete, stuffed some biscuits in his shirt and gave him a drink of water.

"'You're to help dig the grave,' I said.

"He went down to the boat, and then the

RED TOOTH

skipper got in her and took the tiller. They pulled off and was under 'Red Tooth' in twenty minutes, while me and Park got the old man's telescope and watched 'em.

"Through the glass you could see a narrow strip of shore below the great rock, and there they landed, got the corpse on the beach and set to work to dig a grave. 'Peared to be heavy going by the look of it, and they all took a hand but Barlow himself. He sat down on the coffin in the shade and smoked his pipe; but while other men had a rest between shifts, Pete had not. He was kept at it till they'd got three or four feet into the shingle, and then, when all hands had lowered down Jacko into his resting-place, 'twas Pete had to shovel in the stuff.

"The sun was well over the fore-yard arm afore they'd finished, and me and Paul found ourselves properly thirsty, even with looking on. So we went and had a drink, and then he got out a line, to see if he could catch a fish or two for dinner. There's funny fish in them waters, and many so beastly ugly to look at you wouldn't poison a dog wi' 'em; but albacore's a fine thing, and flying-fish is so good as mackerel, in my opinion.

"Paul did nought but chatter cheerfully, for he was properly pleased to think our Jacko had got his marching orders; and I'd seen enough of the man to feel the world was better without him. But we felt a bit sorry for Pete, because, though too young to be hanged, it meant locking up, of course, and very likely five years in a reformatory at best.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"‘De boy ought to be well paid for him trouble —dat what I say,’ declared Park ; and I agreed with him.

“But then a very startling thing happened, and it began to look as though Burke Barlow was going to take the law into his own hands and be judge and executioner both on the white nigger.

“For, taking another squint through the glass, I saw the job was done and they were about starting to come back. The sand was made smooth over the grave and all were aboard but Burke and the boy ; and then Burke got in, and, as Pete came forward, he ordered him back. The lad stood stock still, as though he was turned to stone, and the boat put off and left him on ‘Red Tooth’ alone. I fairly rubbed my eyes, but there wasn’t much doubt of what had happened : the boy was marooned to be left to starve to death there !

“‘Dat his game,’ said Paul, ‘and we no dare say nuffin.’

“‘Then ’tis up to us to mutiny,’ I said in my wrath. ‘I’d knock the damned tiger on the head myself !’

“But Paul wasn’t much troubled for Pete, and I could see that if anything was to be done, I should have to do it. I guessed the dagos wouldn’t bother their heads neither, and though we might inform at the next port, which was Grenada, that wouldn’t help Pete much, unless we got there a lot sooner than seemed likely, for the calm held ; the sky was all molten fire and the sea like dark blue glass beneath it.

RED TOOTH

"They came aboard and Barlow went below without a word. He ate his meat and drank his whack, and in the afternoon he sat aft with his eyes glued to the telescope. As for us, we could just see the boy with the naked eye, and he appeared to be lying very still on the sand, under the scant shade of a rock.

"Then the skipper began cursing for wind ; for he wanted to get out of sight of 'Red Tooth' and his work there. We had a bit of a yarn forward, and I found that only Wilkins cared a button about it. They were all very savage and thought it a blackguardly piece of work ; but they weren't savage enough to interfere, and Wilkins thought I took too grave a view. For he reckoned it was only done to give Pete a shaking up. 'You see,' he said, 'the old man will bring him off to-morrow.'

"But Barlow soon threw a bit of light on that, for he told me point-blank afore sundown he was going to let the boy stop there.

"'He's murdered my best friend,' he said, 'and I'll murder him, and who'll say the dirty dog don't deserve it ?'

"'You can't do that sort of thing, Captain,' I told the man. 'He must be judged by the law of the land ; and 'cause he's done murder in a fit of rage, that's no reason why for you should do the same in cold blood.'

"Barlow looked me up and down wicked like and his eyes flashed red as rubies.

"'Go forrad !' he said ; 'and if there's a man on this ship thinks to come between me and the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

life of that blasted nigger, then let him have a care for his own life !'

"I cleared out very spry, for I see seven devils looking out of his eyes ; but I'd woke him up and made him see that we wasn't all of his opinion. The sun went down in a proper blaze presently and there were signs of wind to the south. And at dark, when we'd run up our riding lamp, Barlow came on deck again and gave Paul Park a big revolver and told him to clean it. Which Paul did ; and then he brought it back to the old man and saw him load it in all five chambers. After that Barlow took his place along by the boat, which was inboard off the davits ; and so he showed us mighty clear that any attempt to get to 'Red Tooth' would mean sudden death for them that made it.

"There's no doubt the man was off his head for the time being ; because a pinch of sense would have shown him that he was on the high road to murder with witnesses ; and that meant hanging. For the facts being as they were, 'twas a thousand to one against any jury—black or white—letting him off ; and if he didn't get strung up, it must mean penal servitude, as sure as Barlow was born.

"But he'd thought out this bit of cruelty to the dregs, and evidently reckoned that he'd planned just such a revenge as dead Jacko himself would have applauded. For the time being, at any rate, he didn't trouble about the future, when facts should come out and his part be known.

"There was no singing nor chaffing in the fo'c'sle

RED TOOTH

that night, for though few cared anything, the thought of that doomed boy acted as a bit of a damper, and most of us had our smoke and turned in earlier than usual. I shared a cabin with Paul, but couldn't sleep myself that night for wondering what I ought to do, and before the morning watch, which was mine, I turned out and went on deck. There was a lap alongside and the promise of a breeze; but there'd been no order to make sail, and when I relieved Wilkins he told me the old man was still on deck aft. He'd got a hurricane lamp beside him and was reading letters and tearing 'em up and flinging 'em overboard.

"Then the second mate went below, and an hour or so after it came into my head to have another try for Pete.

"I'd tramped a mile or two up and down, and listened to the sea lapping and heard a grampus snort as he swam by. I knew that nought but a dreadful death waited for Pete, for 'Red Tooth' was a good five sea miles from the nearest land, and even if he could have swum so far, the sharks wouldn't let his white skin pass. So at last I made up my mind to have another dash at the skipper. *El Santo Rosario* was a long boat, with fine lines and a low free-board, and now I went amidships, just past the hatchway, and lifted my voice and said :

"Please, Cap'n, 'tis Ned Bloom, and may I have a word with you?"

"No!" he said. "And if you, or any man, comes aft, I'll blow his brains out."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Well, that was clear, and left no manner of doubt as to his meaning in my mind. I stepped back slippy and didn't argue about it. For he meant his words, and in his desperate state—very near mad with rage at the loss of his pal—he felt he'd so soon be hung for a sheep like me, as a lamb like the white nigger.

"'Twas half-an-hour after that, with the first lick of the wind on my face, and the first creak from the blocks overhead, that I heard a queer sound right under the bows. It was a sort of hissing noise, but not such as any sea creature makes that I know on, and I went to the starboard bow and looked over. Then the hissing changed to words.

"'Who dat?' said a voice, and I saw a white smudge sitting up in some sort of a craft below and knew it was Pete. He could reach the dolphin-striker, and I slipped out on the bowsprit and got within whispering distance.

"'How the devil——' I began; then, hearing who it was, he spoke.

"'Me wait till dark, sar, and then me dig up Marse Jacko, an' take him out ob his box an' bury him again. Den I broke de lid for paddle an' put stones in de coffin for ballast and come. Me leak berry bad, an' stop to bale often, but I get here. An' I pray to Gord you save me, sar, for de wind berry soon sink me if no come 'board.'

"He'd put up a pretty tough fight for life—eh? Dragged the coffin out, unscrewed the lid with his knife, which he broke short off for the purpose,

RED TOOTH

and paddled two mile, or more, to the *Holy Rosary*, guided by her riding light !

" I thought for half-a-minute.

" ' For Gord's sake, sar ! ' he said. Then came the old man's whistle sharp and shrill, for you could swear to the wind now.

" ' Tumble up and get the anchor,' he shouted. With that I gave the boy a hand and bade him be silent as the dead if he wanted to live. He was soon hanging by a chain under the bowsprit, and as he got my paw, he pressed down his queer craft so that it filled and sank. Then we weighed anchor and made sail ; and when the coast was clear and Barlow had turned in, me and Paul Park helped the kid aboard. He was very near done for—stark naked—with his hands torn to the bone almost by his digging ; and when the critical moment was past and we got him up and he knew he was saved, he fainted. We thought he'd gone dead, and as he wouldn't come round Paul advised we threw him overboard and made an end of it; but I could feel his heart going, and after we'd got a drop of spirits down his neck he showed signs of life.

" Me and Paul shared a cabin, and, under the darkness, we chanced it and carried him in there, for Paul advised against telling the dagos or Wilkins. And once laid out comfortable and able to drink, the boy came slowly to his senses. We nursed him so well as we could, and it was easy to get him a bit of grub also. In fact, the only danger we feared was a visit from the old

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

man, for Barlow would sometimes look round the ship without warning and poke his nose into the cabins and fo'c'sle. But he'd got his tail down next morning and we saw very little of him as we coasted Grenada and made for St George—our next port.

"I'd meant, if the chance offered, to put Pete ashore here; but we couldn't. Barlow didn't go ashore, and we'd done our business in a couple of hours and made sail again for Tobago. In any case, the boy was too weak to get to land without a lot of help, so he stopped in my bunk and we kept ramming the food into him and changing the bandages on his terrible hands. Not a soul but me and Paul knew he was aboard.

"At Tobago the *Holy Rosary* lay for a week unloading a mixed cargo and taking in copra. Paul Park, who knew her, broke the news to Pete's aunt—a negress at Scarborough with whom he lived—and she took it in a sporting spirit and was quite willing to help the boy and hide him till we sailed. A wherry came off for him on a night when the skipper and most of the hands were ashore, and the white nigger took his leave of the ship and the sea. A few got to know about it in Scarborough, and a doctor looked after the boy and soon pulled him round. Then a trader here, by the name of McDermott, took him on, and he's done all right ever since; for there's a good spark of the devil in him, as you may guess from this yarn; and a boy who could kill a man and dig him up and go to sea in his coffin will

RED TOOTH

take a bit of stopping when he grows up—what do you think?"

So spake Ned Bloom.

"And what became of Burke Barlow and the good ship *Holy Rosary*?" I asked.

"Both gone to Davy Jones's locker. I went back to Barbados on the home trip, and well I remember how Barlow kept his spy-glass on 'Red Tooth' as we returned a fortnight later. He stood in a bit just to get a better sight of it, and then, when we weren't above three miles off, and I happened to pass him on deck, he handed the glass to me and pointed. What I saw was a few shreds of clothes in a heap and a dozen brown pelicans sitting on the beach. And Burke Barlow thought the clothes held the bones of yonder boy, and I didn't undeceive him."

"I shrugged my shoulders and handed back his telescope without a word, and he said nought, and grinned behind his bush of beard.

"At Bim he broke it to Ward's wife that Jacko had joined the angels, and it soon got wind round his haunts that Ward had been done in by a negro at sea. But I never heard as anybody went into mourning for him—least of all his lady. As for Pete, some of the dagos told the adventure, and the story leaked out after a bit what Barlow had done by way of vengeance to the chap who killed Ward. But Pete weren't a Barbados boy, and there wasn't anybody to fight it out for him there, so the matter was left and no more said."

"I left the coaster then—one voyage was more'n

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

enough for me—but Paul Park kept on with her, and now and again we met at Barbados or Trinidad, for I went back into steam and I've been in our tramp out here ever since. And six months after that adventure I met Paul, who told me Barlow was the same as ever, and would have his spy-glass on 'Red Tooth' for an hour at a time every day he passed the rock. 'Twas his one amusement seemingly—that and drink.

"Two year ago came the end of him. He was making Trinidad one rough evening and the light failed sudden. Any other man would have stood off again and waited for dawn, because the Dragons' Mouths that open into the Gulf of Paria are very tricky places for a sailing ship in foul weather, even by daylight; but Master Barlow, though his crew prayed him to run no such risk, swore he knew the place as well as his own cabin, and held on. And in twenty minutes he'd piled up the *Holy Rosary*, as he was pretty safe to do. You can see a stick or two of her yet, looking down on a smooth day, though she's in five fathom of water.

"The wonder was that any of 'em came out of it alive, for they hadn't got clear of her when she foundered. But it was only putting off the evil hour for most of 'em. In that sea the boat couldn't live and was capsized in a shoal before they'd gone half-a-mile. All but two got drowned, including Burke Barlow himself. But one dago and my pal, Paul, were strong swimmers, and, more by good chance than skill, saved their

RED TOOTH

bacon. Both were took off next day from one of the islets in the estuary, and neither was the worse."

As Ned Bloom finished, Pete himself approached.

"Turtles all aboard de lighter, Marse Bloom," he said.

"I've been telling what a wicked nigger you are, Pete, and how you behaved to poor Jacko on the *Holy Rosary*."

The boy flashed a look—then he grinned.

"Somebody had to kill Marse Jacko, sar," he answered, "an' if I no done kill him, I'se sure some udder gem'man kill him berry quick."

V

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

" **I**T'S like this, the swine's going to his death without no sort of sky-piloting whatsoever. I looks after his body, feed him 'andsome, but his soul—Lord knows that ain't in my line," said Dick Ferris, the mate of the *Flying Fish*.

"No, nor yet in anybody's line aboard this ship," answered the carpenter.

The steamer bowled briskly through the Caribbean Sea, bound for Kingston, Jamaica. She carried cargo and a few passengers, to one of whom the words spoken by Ferris had reference. He was a negro "decker," and a man of some importance, judging from the fact that a special erection of boards had been raised round him. But the circumstance of capital crime alone raised Solly Neil to his present eminence. He now approached the end of his voyage and his earthly pilgrimage together. Blood was upon his head, sentence of death had been passed, and the gallows waited for him at Kingston.

Nobody paid the doomed man much attention excepting Ferris. He, however, took a lively interest in Solly Neil, listened to the recital of his misdeeds, and considered the extent of his punishment very unreasonable.

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

"It's like this," Dick explained to his friends. "I don't say as how he didn't kill a man. He did, and you and me 'ud done the same in his place. His wife ran away with another nigger, and he laid wait and put daylight through both of 'em. Quite right too."

"I spoke to him yesterday," remarked the carpenter. "I said, 'You're a mortal bad lot, Solly, there's no denyin' of it'; and he said, 'Dat's so, massa.' Then I said, 'They'll hang you, old man, sure as eggs is eggs; and why shouldn't they?' And he said, 'Yes, sar, dat's so. I'se gwine to my 'count.'"

"It's his future state as bothers him," declared Ferris. "We may think he ain't done much harm, but the law says he has, so he'll die with a sin on his soul. An' you bet they'll take the judge's word for it in the next world, not a nigger's. Anyways, it's 'ard he can't have no sky-piloting, 'cause he's a man, though black."

Then Dick strolled forward to see Mr Neil.

The negro was sitting in his little temporary cabin on deck—sitting chained with heavy irons, his elbows on his knees, his head down between his hands.

"Well, how goes it? Did you have the grub cook sent along?" asked Dick.

"Yes, tank you, massa. Plenty good grub, sar; but I don't want nuffin much to eat much."

"No. Sky-piloting is what you hankers arter, boy. Natural enough too. But blame me if there's a drop of that tap aboard. Have a whiff?"

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Tank you, massa; don't want no more 'bacco now."

Solly Neil shook his head and looked out over the blue waters with melancholy eyes. He was an elderly negro; deep wrinkles already furrowed his face, and his wool began to grow grey.

"It's berry bad, sar, feelin' you's all wrong wid de A'mighty. I'se dam bad lot, and now I gib de world to hear a minister speak up for me, or any udder gem'man what could."

"Jus' so, jus' so," answered Dick. Then he sucked his pipe and was silent.

Presently Neil spoke again.

"I'm 'complished man, sar, in my way. I can read plenty. If you got de Word now, or de book of hymn songs, seein' dar's no minister nor gem'man what can pray, I might do 'long wid dem."

"Ain't no good books here, my son; devil a one of 'em. An' you can read! Well, that beats anything. There's no man on this 'ere craft can read 'cept you and me, an' the skipper an' the cook."

"Hab dey got good books, sar?"

"Not them; leastways only navigation an' charts. There ain't no sky-piloting in charts, I judge. Can't you manage a bit of a pray nohow?"

The negro only shook his head again.

"Nebber done such a do, Marse."

"Well, keep up your pecker. I'll look round. Maybe the deckers know a hymn, or summat of the sort, among 'em. But you did ought to have taken your last cruise in another ship for sartin."

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

Then he strolled off to see if the *Flying Fish* contained any shred or scrap of spiritual food for Solly.

When the members of the crew found that their first mate extended sympathy to the condemned negro, they too, for the most part, showed humanity in their treatment of him. Men who would have kicked a black from before them, like dirt, under ordinary circumstances, felt that Solly Neil's peculiar position entitled him to respect. Moreover, they considered his punishment was altogether excessive. Fellow-negroes, also, would peep over the partition which screened the culprit. If his warden was out of the way, they handed him bananas, sugar-cane, and like luxuries.

They would also roll their brown eyes and express hopes that their brother had made his peace "wid de Lord."

But that was what Solly Neil had failed to do, and was anxious to do, and could see no possibility of doing. Superstitious to the heart's core, death's terrors were quite dwarfed and dimmed by the more terrific certainty of what awaited him beyond. He took his judge's word for it that he was but a lost man ; and now, with frantic desire, he yearned for some outlet to his penitence, for some religious channel, through which even he might crawl within earshot of his outraged Maker. Heaven seemed blind and dumb to the wretch. But when Ferris left him, the memory of an old tune fell like a wakened echo on Solly's ear. He could not recall the words of the song ; he

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

only recollect that they were religious. The air was better than nothing, and he lifted up his voice and whined the melody again and again to himself until his guard ordered him to be silent.

That night Dick Ferris recounted his recent conversation in the fo'c'sle.

"I told him," he said in conclusion, "how, to my knowledge, there weren't no such thing as a Bible aboard this craft, nor yet a Prayer Book neither."

"Yes, there is, Mr Ferris," piped the cabin-boy.

"Eh? Don't say you've got one, Sprig?"

"No, I ain't; but see this eye," and he pointed to a bruise on his cheek; "that came along of a Bible. The boss have got one."

"The old man!"

"He have. I was tidyin' his cabin round, puttin' things ship-shape, and he sees me hangin' on to the shelf over his bunk, dustin' of it. There was a book atop with a polished black cover, and I picked it up to clean it. Then he says, 'Take your dirty paws off the Word o' God, boy, and stop messin' round and get out of here.' So I ups and says, meanin' no sauce, 'I was cleanin' of the book, sir, what's a inch in dust and dirt.' Then he lathered me for answering."

Nobody appeared much interested in Sprig's personal experience, but the fact that Skipper Greenleaf possessed a Bible called for profane comment.

"Who'll ask the loan of it?" inquired Ferris.

Not a man answered, and he spoke again.

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

"I would an' chance it, but it's useless. He hates me worse than poison. He's been a damned swine to me ever since I sailed. I reckon you'd get it, Bell, if any of us could."

Bell, the carpenter, was considered to be the captain's favourite—a position he denied. This man scratched his head, grumbled and did not take kindly to the enterprise. The general sense of the meeting went against him, however, and he prepared to depart.

"Tell the skipper it's for the prisoner forward, who's going to be hung. He can't refuse sky-piloting even to a nigger in that fix," concluded Ferris.

"He will," said the cook of the *Flying Fish*. "Mark my words ; he'll tell Bell to go to hell."

Pretty soon Bell returned baffled.

"He says he ain't disposed to lend the Word of God to a blackguard black man. And he also says we're to sheer off from Neil for the future. If he sees a seaman alongside him again, the cap'n says that seaman will hear from him direct," explained the carpenter.

They were lost in speculation as to how the skipper came to possess a Bible at all. Then the men separated and Ferris went away. His slow brain was on fire with the wickedness of Captain Greenleaf. He had a conviction that the Bible might make all the difference to Solly Neil's position, if not in this world, at any rate in the next ; he was firmly convinced, therefore, that Providence had placed the book on board for this

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

negro's especial benefit. No matter had ever stirred his faculties so deeply; he could not get the subject out of his head, and the more he reflected upon it the stronger grew his determination to secure salvation for the doomed man at all costs. None took the skipper's refusal to heart as he did; indeed, their first indignation blunted, his messmates laughed at his anxiety. But Dick would not regard the subject as trifling; it appeared to him that tremendous issues were involved. He was new to intercourse with the negroes, and their interests and welfare appeared perfectly serious concerns to him. He debated with himself through long moonlight watches, and his thoughts kept him awake in his bunk. Personally he had never pretended to religion; but the sight of a sinner friendless and comfortless on the brink of the grave—the spectacle of a fellow-man seeking approach to God in vain, and separated by a few days only from death—woke novel emotions in the heart of Dick Ferris and set his mental machinery working more briskly than it had worked before. He knew what a "call" meant, because a friend of his had once received a "call," and joined the Salvation Army upon the strength of it. And now a decision grew strong within him and pointed to action.

Solly Neil—so Dick told himself—must have the skipper's Bible; and Providence had evidently marked him out as a means by which the soul-saving book should reach its destination. He regretted the fact, but conscience made him face

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

it. Eternal life for a perishing creature lurked in his captain's cabin, and the mate of the *Flying Fish* would bring the one to the other. If physical force became necessary, then he must fight. That such a course meant mutiny, and punishment as such, did not challenge him; indeed the consequences of his pending action failed to weigh with him until too late. He could only think of one thing at a time. "After all," he reflected, "the man's a reasonable being. Like enough he'll hand over the book and make no splutter. If he don't—well, he's been spoiling for a smack at me these two voyages; now he shall have it."

That night Dick knocked at the captain's door, was told to come in, and entered to find a very unexpected picture. The skipper lay upon his bunk smoking, and actually reading his Bible!

"What do you want?" he asked shortly, glancing up.

The other, from sheer amazement, clean forgot the elaborate remarks with which he had come prepared. He stood silent, irresolute, gazing upon this wonder before him.

"What do you want, you gaping fool?" inquired Mr Greenleaf once more.

Then Dick found his tongue.

"That, guv'nor," he answered, pointing to the open book.

His captain laughed, and then swore.

"You're the second. What the hell's stung this ship?"

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Tain't for myself. I don't want no Bibles," answered Ferris. "It's like this: that black cove—him that's goin' to be hanged at Kingston—is getting his tail down and losing hope. He's off his feed and takin' on—'cause why? 'Cause he can't have no sky-piloting. You've got a Bible, and he can read, so he says; therefore I reckoned to ask you to lend it out to him for humanity. I'll go bail he won't do no harm to it."

"Oh, you reckoned that, did you? Well, and I reckon you'd best mind your own bloody business in future, and not waste time messing round no black murderer. I don't lend no Bible to him, or anybody. Ain't I reading it myself? Get out of this and go forrad!"

He went on reading, but Ferris stood his ground, and twisted his hat about in his hands.

"Why don't you get? What are you axin' for?"

"Well, it's like this 'ere," answered Dick very slowly. "Sometimes a man finds he ain't his own boss no more. I ain't. I feels a kind o' call sayin' how Solly Neil must have that Bible of yours, and I'm axin' for that and only that. You see, Cap'n Greenleaf, these here blacks is now discovered to have souls, same as whites; and Solly's soul lies in a proper cleft stick, you see, ownin' to its havin' no religion whatsoever. That book 'ud make a powerful sight of difference—just all the difference between aloft and below,

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

maybe. So I begs you most respectful to lend it to him."

"I'll see him damned first!"

"Then I guess I'll take it," said the mate.

The two men looked at one another silently, and Ferris licked his great hands and rubbed them together in preparation. For the moment the only sound in the cabin was the rasping of his rough palms. Then Greenleaf spoke:

"Go right ahead then; take it! I've wanted to see what you were worth with all your gas and bounce. Go right ahead. I'll thrash you here, and then have you flogged on deck, and broke for ever when we get to port."

There was not much room in the captain's cabin for two big men to settle a quarrel by force of arms. Dick grabbed the Bible, and Greenleaf hit him in the face; whereupon Dick dropped the book and hit back, with a "haymaker" that the skipper warded. Both men were soon struggling upon the floor, first one uppermost, then the other. The skipper was tall and very active; but Dick's bulk and weight told in that narrow ring. He propped his superior officer again and again; and then, as they rose from a fall, with Dick under, the skipper, aware that he had more than met his match in such close quarters, lifted his hand above his head and snatched a revolver which hung upon the cabin wall. He was quick, but not quick enough. Ferris dashed in, and, with all his weight behind the blow, hit Mr Greenleaf full and fair upon the chin as he

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

fired. One man went down in a senseless heap at the corner of his cabin, the other felt a stab of pain, and then saw a sudden stream of blood trickling down his arm into his hand. He picked up the Bible and staggered out into the alley-way.

A crowd had there collected upon sound of the shot, and Dick pushed through them, explaining as he went :

"He've hit me somewhere in the neck, and I've knocked him out. Best go in and get him on his bunk an' do what's possible."

Then, leaving a line of red splashes on the deck, he went forward with his prize, and handed the Bible to Solly Neil. The negro clasped the book with rejoicings, and was little concerned to know what had taken place.

"Read, boy, drive into it like hell!" said Dick. "There's a chance yet if you only hold on like grim death. I've knocked him silly, but he may come round. It's the skipper's own. He don't understand no Bibles, else he'd 'a' fought fair an' not fired on me. But he pretty nigh missed, whereas I didn't. You just buckle to it and read for all your worth till he comes for it."

Then Ferris went to the galley to see after himself and get the cook's aid.

He had sustained no serious injuries. While the cook washed his shoulder and bound it up, Ferris asked after Mr Greenleaf.

"How's the old man?" he said.

"Bad. There's nothing broke as I can find,

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

and he's breathing pretty free, but he ain't come to his senses yet."

Then the hours fled by, and the entire ship's company grew more and more anxious to learn how their captain prospered. Sailors are not Job's comforters at best, and Dick heard enough before the dawn of the next day to depress him considerably.

"You was right in one sense, having a 'call,' to do it," said Bell, who had a luminous way of putting problems; "but the law don't take no heed of a 'call.' What you've done is to mutiny, and steal the skipper's property, and maybe murder him. Time will show. If he dies, it *is* murder, and you'll get strung up of course."

"All for a lousy nigger," grumbled the cook.

"For his soul—not him," said Dick. "I don't much like Neil as a man. Now he's sucking at the book like a child at its mother; so he may just wriggle through."

But the skipper was not dead. He recovered consciousness about two hours after the battle; and it happened that the cook was with him at the time.

"The fust thing he says, mighty faint in his throat, is 'Whar'd I hit Ferris?' Then I says, 'You went through his shoulder, sir, that's all.' Then he grunted and put his hand to his jaw, and says, 'I know whar he hit me.' After that he told me to make the cabin dark and clear out; but I stuck on, knowing as how he should have food, and I made him bite and drink a bit, owing to him being too feeble to refuse. But he swore the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

whole outfit to blue, blazing hell. I reckon he's turned the corner all right."

The cook was not mistaken, for within two days the skipper had his chair brought up on deck, and presently appeared himself with a face every colour of the rainbow. He sat and smoked, saying no word to anybody. Then a strange thing occurred, for Mr Greenleaf suddenly arose, walked stiffly and lamely across the ship and disappeared behind the partition which hid Solly Neil. The negro, absorbed in his book, heard but heeded nothing. He conned the Bible from dawn till twilight. Already he had won vast consolation from it.

"How are you going on, nig?" asked Greenleaf suddenly.

"Berry nice, marse," answered Solly. Then he marked his place with a finger, looked up, saw who was speaking, and trembled as he clung to the treasure.

"For Gard's sake lemme hold on de precious Word, sar! I'se gettin' straight wid de Lord fast now."

The white man regarded him gloomily.

"I'll leave it on one condition. If ever you makes that port, which ain't particular likely, you must put in a word for this ship. Just in a general sort of way—needn't mention no names but mine—just Joe Greenleaf and crew. I didn't lend that book kinder easy, but now you've got it, you can keep your fins on it till we make Kingston."

Mr Greenleaf had heard and believed a super-

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

stition that the dying, or doomed, enjoy strange powers, and he suspected that his Bible might be the holier for Solly Neil's black hands. His mind had worked during recent hours, and his reflection brought him to a somewhat unexpected conclusion.

The men talked over the mystery of their skipper's continued silence.

"He's nursin' it, mate, to keep it biling-hot for you in port," said Bell to Dick Ferris. "He's lyin' low and lettin' it just fester in him. He's breakin' his heart to flog you afore all hands, only he knows he ain't got strength to do you proper yet."

One immediate question none could answer. Why had not Greenleaf put Ferris in irons?

Upon the following day the skipper, relieving Ferris, resumed his duties, and soon afterwards the *Flying Fish* sailed into Kingston Harbour. Nothing out of the common occurred at that port. There were rumours and whisperings, but Joseph Greenleaf took no official move in the matter of his mate. Work went on as usual ; the vessel was unloaded and filled again ; Solly Neil departed joyfully to gaol, upon learning that benefit of clergy there awaited him during the few remaining days of his existence. He blessed Mr Greenleaf, but forgot all about Dick.

"Twould break the poor fool's heart if he had a respite now," said Bell.

"He feels his soul is safe for the minute and wants to go while it remains so," explained Ferris.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

About a week afterwards, at dawn of a golden morning, the *Flying Fish* sailed again, and, as she slipped away to sea, Dick stood for a moment gazing at the little house where Neil had lived, before he ordered it to be pulled down.

"What you starin' at?" asked somebody standing by him. It was the skipper who spoke, and these were the first words which had passed between him and his mate, save upon ship matters, since their struggle.

"Nought, Cap'n. I was just thinking they'd strung the murderer an hour afore we sailed."

"We had some difference, if I remember, touching that deck passenger," said Greenleaf coolly.

"We had. I'm awful sorry I smashed you up so bad, but you didn't ought to have shoot. It weren't no ordinary case. I never mutinied afore; but sky-piloting looked to be the only useful thing for a man in his fix; so it was borne in on me I had to try for it. And, God knows, I thank you proper for keeping your mouth shut ashore."

Greenleaf looked with ruminating eyes upon his mate. He was indifferent to the expression of gratitude.

"I've figured it out you had a 'call.' And 'calls' be like yellow jack, or any other force of nature. You couldn't help doing of it. Solly afore he went over the side said how if he gets aloft 'twill be through my fine Bible. So I reckoned to make a bargain with him. If he makes harbour I gave

THE SKIPPER'S BIBLE

him the office to put in a word for this ship, not mentioning no names except mine, but including all hands free and general. Smart—eh?"

"Terrible smart, sure enough. He'll remember if he's saved, I daresay."

"And you and me'd better shake. Then tel 'em to pull this shanty down."

VI

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

i

WHERE Nature has spent her fury in olden times, often are yet to be seen evidences of amazing phenomena ; and to these wonders man brings his dreams and magic, that he may credit natural things with supernatural forces potent in the affairs of humanity.

At Grenada, in the West Indies, like a cat's eye glimmering up from the verdure-clad mountains, there lies the Grand Étang, a little lake of small surface but mighty depth ; and in the darkness of those still waters abode the Mother of the Rain—a siren deity, concerning whom the negroes and Caribs held that she was ever ready to reward the good and punish the evil-doer.

The Grand Étang is a gem set in filigree of gold and silver foliage, seen through curtains of interlacing bough, waving leaf and feathered palm. It shines in silent peace among volcanic crags, a very fit dwelling for the spirit of romance. The trembling disciple of Obi knows the Mother of the Rain, and the older generations of the coloured people, who worship strange gods. They will tell you that the lady of the lake may yet be seen when night hides the land and a full moon shines

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

down upon the water. At such times eye of man shall behold a sudden ripple and mark the form of the goddess rising from her grotto in the depths. Then unearthly melody floats upon the midnight air, and the chance beholder is rewarded, or punished, according to his deserts. Many are the legends of the Grand Étang, and among them old men still tell stories handed down from their grandfathers, of how the buccaneers from the Spanish Main used the goddess for their own purpose, traded upon the local dread of the Rain Mother and hid their pirate treasures beside her fount, knowing them safe enough within her keeping.

To-day the mystery grows thin and Quashie has ceased to fear those sequestered waters ; but, fifty years ago, when these things happened, faith was still quick in negro hearts and the extraordinary event to be told brought new lustre to the fading fame of the Grand Étang. For how could she—the Rain Mother—be sleeping or departed, who knew so well and wondrously to guard virtue and punish him who contrived evil?

Not that Nick Brown had any evil record ; otherwise, when he came courting old Solomon's granddaughter, he had quickly been sent about his business. But he belonged to the doubtful sort. He was a lazy nigger, and he did neither good nor harm, but just dawdled away his life, smoking on the wharves, drinking in the bars, dreaming dreams of prosperity, working three days a week for such comforts as he required, and planning a

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

matrimonial alliance that should make it possible to live in idleness for ever.

He was a big, buck nigger, six foot tall and finely set up; and the black maidens thought a good deal of him, yet not as much as he thought of himself.

Annie was pretty and friendly and the apple of her grandfather's eye; while he—old Pete Solomon—stood among the most prosperous coloured gentlemen in Grenada. So Nick, always hopeful where his own luck was concerned, went to see Marse Solomon and ask, in mighty gentlemanly fashion, if he might pay his addresses to the girl.

Pete Solomon was a fruit-grower, and his gardens lay by a creek half-a-mile from St George. One reached them through a grove of coco-nut palms, with grey, curved trunks, all bent delicately, as it might seem, by the weight of their great heads. There branched the drooping fronds, green above, golden-brown beneath; they were full of fruit, too, in all stages of youth and maturity. Upon some the nuts clustered ripe, wrapped in their husk cases; on others they still remained green; while many bore sprigs of infant nuts that looked like huge golden acorns.

Through a litter of mealy husks, piles of forage and fruit-crates, Nick proceeded. Then he passed a plantation patch and came to the fruit-trees—shaddocks, mandarins, limes and citrons, their boughs bending beneath a green and red and yellow harvest. Above them lofty mango-trees

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

were in flower, and little green humming-birds darted about among the masses of inflorescence. In the shadows the tiny birds were black, but like emeralds they flashed through the sunshine.

Here Nick met old Solomon as he led in a Barbados cow.

Pete Solomon was a survival—a full-blooded son of slaves—one who lauded the Ethiopian and mistrusted all white men. He was full of quirks and cranks and, incidentally, a firm believer in the Mother of the Rain.

"What you want dressed out so smart, Marse Brown?" asked the fruit-grower. He was a little negro with grey wool, a wrinkled face and a bent back.

"I come to you, sar, and I pay you respects and dress smart. I lub Miss Annie, and she no' hate me; but I no' do nuffin till you friendly to me, Marse Solomon."

The old man shook his head doubtfully.

"I want her to marry a black man, but I 'fraid you'se too late, Nicholas. Anudder gem'man courting Annie. Here dey is dis minute."

A man and girl approached as he spoke—a slim, bright-eyed maiden in white, with a scarlet handkerchief tied over her curly head, and a young half-caste—by no means such a fine fellow as Nick to the eye. He had a simple, cheerful face and his father's grey eyes. He was the son of an old seaman, who married a black wife, settled at Grenada, and died there when his son was a baby.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Sam Martin had now risen to be waterman, and he owned two big lighters, which came and went to lade the ships and take off their cargoes. Nick knew him for a rival, but was not aware that he stood higher in Annie's good graces than himself.

Now they approached, and Samuel smiled amiably, while Nick grinned also and swept off his straw hat to Annie.

He doubted not that the lighterman would soon take second place when he began to make love in earnest; but he was wrong, and when Pete and his cow had passed on their way, Annie broke the news.

"I'se terrible happy gal, Marse Brown, because I'se gwine to marry Marse Martin."

"Yo' too good for Samuel Martin, Annie, and he berry well know yo' too good."

Samuel looked astonished, and turned his face to Annie.

"You no' talk so, sar," she said. "Marse Martin, him a white gem'man, an' I always say I marry a white man."

"White!" cried Nick, with scorn. "Dat fing white! He no' white, an' he no' black. An' he no damn good. An' you no' marry him if I can help it, because I make you a better husband dan him."

The other was conciliatory.

"You make berry good husband, Marse Brown; but Annie lub me, so I better man for her," argued Martin calmly.

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

"I soon make her lub me den! I make her forget all about a pusson like you!" threatened Nick.

Then Annie ended the conversation.

"I'se heard nuff ob dis. You berry fine man, Marse Brown, and if dar was no Sam Martin, den I no want nobody finer; but Samuel is my man, so dar's de end ob it."

"He only want you for your gran'fadder's money," declared Nick, and Mr Martin protested.

"Dat most wicked, Marse Brown! I plenty money for Annie."

Then, seeing that he had to do with a very simple soul, Marse Brown calmed his rage and became more diplomatic.

"I say no more. I too sad. My life all gone to hell. I nuffin left if Annie took away. My Gard! What I do now?"

"Find anudder gal. Dar plenty udder gals, sar," said Samuel.

"I killed dead," declared Marse Brown. "Dar nuffin more to say, and I wish you a berry good-ebening, Annie."

"Berry good ebening, den. An' Marse Martin suit me, an' he ask me first."

Then Nicholas went away with a bent head and rage in his heart. For this was bitter disappointment. He had felt hopeful that Annie would be proud to win a man so popular with the sex, and he had decided to follow in Marse Solomon's shoes and sit under his orange-trees.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Nick went his way, and chance threw him into the path of a very big rascal.

"De debbil send him," thought Marse Brown. "But if he help me to get Annie, I no' care who send him."

'Bolivar' Binns was an elderly, medium-sized white man, concerning whom no good could be recorded. He had a pock-marked, hairless face on a scraggy neck, cold blue eyes set curiously wide apart, a low brow and a very heavy, fighting chin. He looked as much like a reptile as a man, and one almost expected to see a forked tongue flicker when he opened his narrow mouth. His left hand lacked two fingers—the middle and fore. That was a Trinidad story; and after Bolivar had lost those digits under a bowie knife, which fell like doom upon them when he was signalling at cards to a confederate, he left Port of Spain and settled at St George, as a place less unhealthy. None knew how he lived; but he was thought to have an interest in a coasting schooner. He dwelt alone in a log-house outside the town, with an old negro to cook for him and mend his clothes. Sometimes he helped Martin with the lighters, when a steamer was in and merchandise awaited her.

He knew Brown—indeed he knew everybody; but his reputation was such that none much cared to be seen in his company.

Now he looked at Nick's fine clothes.

"Where you steal that lot?" he asked.

"I dam sick nigger," answered Nicholas. "I

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

gib Samuel Martin hell. He done me out wid Annie Solomon."

"What should such a fine, rich gurl want with a worthless bummer like you?"

"I not a worfless bummer. If I been a bit quicker, I cotched her. Her gran'fadder on my side."

"Larn you not to be so darned lazy then."

"Yo' smartest man in San George, sar—ebbery-body know dat. How I cut out de swine? I gib my soul to de debbil to smash Marse Martin."

"Ain't what you'd give to the devil, nig; it's what you'd give me."

"Marse Solomon, him eighty-free year old," explained Nick; "and all him folk dead but Annie. Her fadder was drowned an' her mudder die ob yellow fever ten year ago. So she hab de gardens and de stone house and all."

"Well, what's that to me? She won't marry me, that's a cert."

"If yo' help me wid Martin, I do yo' plenty good turn when old man Solomon send in his checks—please Gard I die dis minute if I don't."

Bolivar Binns seemed to stab the big negro with his little blue eyes.

"You're not tough enough," he said. "You're not made of the stuff to be any good, nor yet partickler bad. You're the squashy sort of mess that wants everything for nothing—too lazy to be anything but lazy—not hot enough to help stoke hell, and not class enough for anywhere else."

"I stoke hell for Marse Martin," promised Nick.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"I no' lazy 'bout dis job. I take plenty trouble, and if yo' help me to get Annie away from dat beast, I no' forget you."

"That you won't, myson. Well, Peter Solomon's shoes—eh? And a corner for me and the run of my teeth and a bit of the ready when I want it."

"You straight to me; I straight to you," said Marse Brown.

"You're the sort of one-hoss blackguard that always wants a worse man to help him. I'll think about it; and don't you say you've been talking to me. If that dirt-coloured boy's barges were on the market—perhaps I—— But—no, Nick, you're not hard enough in the gizzard. You'd want me to do all the work."

ii

Annie Solomon had found that her grandfather was less pleased with Samuel Martin than might have been wished. For Pete was a full-blooded negro himself, and his granddaughter a pure negress; and while she and her generation valued white blood—while, indeed, most black girls choose any lover of a complexion less ebony than their own—it happened that Marse Solomon preferred pure Ethiopian and was distinctly prejudiced against the 'Che-che,' a generic term for anybody with a European or American strain in his composition.

"I no' quarrel wid Marse Martin," he said to Annie. "He berry good man; but Marse Brown —him negro. An' I wish you lub him 'stead of

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

Marse Martin. Yo' gals all tink if man got streak of white man in him he better dan black man; an' I say not so—him mostly worse."

"Marse Martin work harder dan Marse Nick, an' he tink great tings ob you, gran'fadder."

"So Marse Nick—he tink great tings ob me too. He berry civil gem'man. I wish yo' makeudder arrangements, Annie. But yo' no' hab it all yo' own way wid Marse Martin. I must get second opinion 'bout him."

"Ebberybody tell same 'bout him—harbour-master and ebberybody."

"Yo' laugh, yo' children, because yo' fools," said Pete. "Yo' laugh at what we old folk know de solemn troof. And when I say I get second opinion, I don't meanudder people; I mean de spirits."

"Oh, my! How we know what de spirits tink ob Marse Martin?"

"Cause if we call on dem, dey tell us, Annie. De Mudder ob de Rain am de great Spirit dat lives in de Grand Étang."

Annie's eyes grew round.

"She Negro Spirit," he continued, "an' she know to mark de sheep from de goats. An' she tell niggers many tings dey better for knowing. She terrible wise and strong. An' dis I say. If Marse Martin a good man, he no' fear de Spirit; an' if he bad man, den she soon treat him rough an' show him up."

"People frightened to go to Grand Étang by night," said Annie.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Why? Because dey mostly bad; an' dey know de Mudder ob de Rain catch 'em out," he answered. "But she nebber do hard tings to a good man; and if Marse Samuel so wonnerful good as he say, den she reward him; but if he be lying an' he wicked man, den we nebber see him no more."

Annie reflected over this tremendous proposition. Marse Martin was a Christian negro and went to church. She had never heard him talk about the Mother of the Rain, and she felt little doubt that Samuel did not believe in the lady. But he was superstitious, as most negroes are, and, for all she knew, might refuse any such ordeal. On the other hand, he might be braver than she suspected.

"I tell him what you say," she promised, and a day later she went to the wharf and broke the news to Samuel.

He stood among a dozen ragged niggers who were loading one of his lighters with coco-nuts and boxes of raw cocoa.

She explained that her grandfather believed in the goddess of the island lake and desired an expert opinion on the subject of Marse Martin.

"If you good as you are good," said Annie, "den gran'fadder say de spirit reward you; an' if you no' good, den he say you no' come back 'gain."

The matter-of-fact Samuel stared and his brown eyes rolled.

"De Mudder ob de Rain!" he said. "Dar no such pusson, Annie!"

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

"Ole man sure dar are. An' if dar aren't, den yo' all right, an' if dar are, den yo' all right still—'cause you so good, Samuel."

"I berry good, an' I Jesus Christ's man, an' I no' frightened ob nobody."

"Den yo' go up when de moon full, Samuel. An' I tell old man yo' go."

Nick Brown wandered along at this moment. He had come to see Mr Binns, who was helping to load a lighter, but, on observing Annie, ignored his fellow-conspirator. Despite his reverse, he had preserved a show of friendship with both Samuel and his sweetheart; he had even apologised and expressed regret that he should have been rude to his successful rival.

"I see yo' terrible busy, Marse Martin," he said; "I take off my coat and lend a hand, sar, if you please."

"Do you tink de Mudder ob de Rain in de lake in de mountains, Marse Brown?" asked Annie. "Because my gran'fadder say she am."

"Den I say she am," declared Nick stoutly.

"He say de Spirit plenty short and sharp wid bad man and plenty kind to good man," explained Annie; "and she know sure if Marse Martin is good."

"De power ob de Lord hab made me good," explained Martin, "and so I no' frightened ob de lake by night. Marse Solomon want me to go up dar at full moon an' see what happen. So I go."

"Would you do dat, Nick?" asked Annie.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"If Marse Solomon say me go, den I go," vowed Nicholas.

Then Marse Martin was called to his laden lighter and put off with her to a steamer lying half-a-mile from shore.

Annie, full of pride at Samuel's rare courage, went home to tell her grandfather that he accepted the ordeal, and when she was out of sight, Nick strolled over to Bolivar Binns, who was resting from his labours until Samuel's second lighter returned empty from the steamer.

"I come yo' house to-night," he said. "I hear a tale plenty interesting 'bout dat Martin."

They were out of earshot, and Binns spoke.

"I was turning over if I could give the boy a bit of jolt some night, coming back from a cargo boat after dark, as we often do."

"I tell yo' all I know to-night, Marse Binns," promised Nick, and then he strolled off.

The negro had seen Bolivar several times of late, and suffered in reputation accordingly. He had also suffered in his soul. His empty mind left him unarmed against this hardened black-guard, and from a first dread and fear at the character of Bolivar's suggestions, Marse Brown gradually worked himself up into a kindred, cut-throat ferocity. He liked talking big, but Binns knew the average negro is not to be trusted with single-handed crime, and as yet felt no temptation to put confidence in his accomplice. It amused him to terrify Nicholas and see his temper triumphing over his native cowardice. Bolivar

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

was already calculating whether it would pay him best to assist Brown, or turn traitor and warn Martin against him.

It is certain, at this stage of the adventure, that Mr Binns had no idea of soiling his hands with blood. At best the game was not worth the candle. But now that happened to inspire a more sinister view. The means to do an evil deed had from time to time presented themselves to Bolivar Binns, and it cannot be said that he often neglected his opportunities.

Now came Marse Brown by night, and brought the news that old Solomon still stood in doubt concerning Samuel, and had proposed the nocturnal ordeal of a visit to the Grand Étang.

"Ole man Solomon, he say de Spirit up dar still; he tell Martin him go an' see what she do to him, 'cause she good to the good an' mighty bad to the bad."

"He won't go," said Bolivar. "He'll just creep off and play 'possum, and next morning he'll sail round to show he's all right."

"He say him go."

"He don't funk it?"

"Not him—no more dan a calf funk de butcher."

Binns considered.

"And if he don't come back?"

"Dat all right. Dat show he not so good as he pretend. If he no' come back—den de Spirit wipe him out an' no more said. Den I come along."

"And what does the gurl think?"

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"She no' feared, 'cause she reckon Samuel hab plenty angels to look after him."

Bolivar now permitted his thoughts to take a darker colour. But he knew what looks easy is often difficult at a pinch. The future centred on Nicholas and how far he might be trusted. Mr Binns saw one thing clearly enough. If this was to happen, it must leave Marse Brown in his power, and not place him in the power of Marse Brown.

"Waal, old son, and what d'you think about it?" he asked. "Of course this is your pigeon—not mine. You've got everything to gain, and once this psalm-singing bloke is out of the way you win in a canter. The old man likes 'em all black better than brindled, and he'd be very willing for you to be his granddaughter's husband, so I'm told. So how does it strike on your thinking-box?"

Marse Brown replied :

"Fust place, dar no such pusson as de Mudder ob de Rain."

"That's so. We can rule out conjuring tricks."

"He come all alone, free mile away from de nearest house."

"Right."

"An' if yo' see him in de moonlight and tink him a loup garou—such a dead shot wid your revolver as Marse Binns! How dat?"

"Fine, Nick! And you stop at home in bed, so you shan't be drawn in. And I come back and say I've had a shocking accident in the bush."

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

"Me Gard ! A splendid plan—you too clebber, Marse Binns!"

"Too clever to do your job, anyway. No, nig ; we won't pretend nothing. If this is going to happen, you and me don't come into the picture, no more than Samuel will afterwards. No dead bodies around for me. If there was brains wanted for this, I'd say leave it alone ; if it could go wrong any sort of how, I'd take darnation good care not to meddle with it, or let you ; but it's about the greatest cert I ever struck since—no matter when. Your star's up, Nick."

"Whar yo' come in, den ?" asked the negro.

"I come in at the death—see ? You win the trick and take the stakes—Annie Solomon and the fortune—and I'm at your elbow to see you through and do all that's to be done."

"Yo' see me froo ?"

"Bet your bottom one I shall—and see the enemy through too."

Marse Brown breathed hard now, snorted through his broad nostrils, and worked himself up into a fine fervour. He was like a child who tries to grow angry—to save himself from getting frightened.

"Cuss de dam fellow—cuss and cuss him ! To hell wid de scamp !"

"Remember he stands between you and the best time ever a nigger hoped for. Just you remember Annie, and the stone house and the citron orchard and the coco-nuts and all the rest of it ! All yours—for what ? For letting

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

moonlight into that putty-coloured swine. And no more danger to it than if you was shooting a cat. He drops, and we look after him, so his bones won't luff up in the public eye till Judgment Day. Presently it gets out he's missing and went up to the Grand Étang by night. The police will look for him and be very clever, and guess he's drowned, and that, given time, he'll float; but—no, sir! He won't float any more than he'll fly. They won't find him. And Pete Solomon will swear that the Mother of the Rain's got him, and Annie will see he weren't so good as she thought, and soon be ready to let you take his place."

"Yo' help—yo' stand by, so I make no mistake?"

"Yes, I'll stand by all right; and you can't make no mistake if you put the iron against his ear-hole and pull the trigger. That's all you've got to do. I'll look after the funeral, and read the burial service."

"I kill de beast—I kill him, Marse Binns!"

"Keep your nerve and keep your mouth shut, and don't think about it—see? Don't think about it more than you'd think of climbing a tree for mangoes. Lucky there's no long time to wait. Moon's full on Friday. And hold off the rum till after. Just be about as usual and see me here Thursday night. Then I'll have the contraption ready."

"I hate him—worse dan de debbil I hate him, so help me," swore Nick.

"That's so—so do I—hate him through his

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

flesh to his bones. But you mind not to say so. Be mighty friendly if you run up against him. Tell him he's a brave man, and say you wouldn't go to the Grand Étang at full moon for a sack of diamonds."

"I tell him dat," promised Marse Brown.

Then he departed, and Bolivar Binns, strung up to the business of murdering an innocent and defenceless man, looked out his iron—a Colt's revolver of bull-dog pattern, suited to operations at short range.

iii

When Friday came and the sun had turned west over the Grand Étang, where its waters blazed, like molten metal, in their setting of precipice and forest, two men were busy not far from the margin of the lake. A rough path skirted the tarn, and removed twenty yards from it, in a little rift of the underwood, there rose a lump of porphyry rock lifted ten feet above the level ground. It was a stone whereon lizards were wont to bask and great black and lemon, swallow-tailed butterflies sit and sun themselves. The mass sank into the ground, and at its foot Bolivar Binns and Nicholas were digging a grave.

They did not dig together, for while one worked the other stood in the fork of a dead tree that overlooked the lake and the rough mule track that circled it. Chance of a passer-by was very small, yet could not be disregarded ; so the rascals took turn about, and while one toiled in the stony grit,

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

the other smoked cigarettes and kept his eye on the path.

Nicholas had supposed that they would fling their dead man into the Grand Étang, but Mr Binns held other views.

"Never trust water, my son. Water played a friend of mine a dirty trick once. 'Dust to Dust' is a very good motto. We'll pop him in the ground and make all ship-shape, and the lizards won't tell no tales, and more won't Sammy. Three feet he shall have, and we'll trail the growing weeds over him and fling a bit of trash on top and plant a few seeds for luck."

The plot left not a loophole for failure, and it seemed that no power on earth could save Marse Martin now. He would come at midnight, to perambulate the lake; and abreast of his hidden grave he would perish. There remained only the Mother of the Rain to save him, if, indeed, she held the young half-caste worthy of her attention.

The sun began to sink, and the grave was two feet deep when Binns knocked off and Nick proceeded with the work.

"Get busy," said the white man. "There's not more than twenty minutes of daylight."

He climbed to the fork of the lightning-stricken tree and listened to the dull reverberation of Marse Brown's pick as it echoed on the air. But presently the noise stopped and a great silence brooded over the woods and water. There was no gracious twilight here. A gorgeous sunset of rose and gold streaked with tattered ribbons of

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

orange cloud lit the wide sky and flung a reflection on the enchanted waters. It waned swiftly; the green began to die from the forest, and approaching night soon threatened to smudge the colour out of everything.

Cursing his accomplice, Bolivar prepared to descend from his perch; but before he had reached the ground Nick already stood at the foot of the tree.

"What the hell's the matter? It'll be dark in a minute."

"Oh, my Gard, sar! Come—quick—anudder gem'man buried in de hole a'ready!"

The negro was much excited. Binns said nothing, but followed him to their excavation and found that Nicholas had come upon a face of wood. He could see rough and rotting boards bound with clamps of rusty iron.

"A coffin, by de Lord," said Marse Brown.

The other looked and jumped down. The mouldy wood cracked under his weight.

"A coffin? It's no coffin, you loon! Give me the pick," cried Bolivar, and with a few strokes he smashed in the top of the chest. And through the fading light, touched by the afterglow that now ran in a flood of mellow rose over the sky, Mr Binns found that he had struck it rich.

Gold chinked to his stroke from rotten sail-cloth wrappings; golden doubloons were hid here—how many remained to be discovered; but the stock was apparently large. He buried his hands and brought them up full.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Nicholas stared and Bolivar laughed.

"Pirates' stuff," he said. "We've took the trick this journey. Work like hell, before it's dark—get 'em out—get 'em out!"

"Dey often tell de ole sea-robbers hide gold by de lake, 'cause de folk feared to come to dis place."

"They told true for once. There's no money like this moving in the world nowadays."

"We share an' share, massa?"

"That's so—that's so. But for God's sake keep you mouth shut about it. Don't let on to a soul."

The great pile increased and night spread fast over the hills. Already the palms were ink-black silhouettes against the sky, where they broke the rolling masses of the trees. Fire-flies began to twinkle and flash; the tree frogs started their purring; the blacksmith frogs of Grenada lifted their voices round the lake with musical croakings, like hammers falling upon distant anvils.

Mr Binns calculated that he stood in front of something like twenty thousand pounds of gold. It might represent more or less, but it was a mighty sum to him. They had got to the bottom of the chest, which contained nothing but the doubloons. Then he lit a cigarette and used his brains, while Nick gabbled cheerfully. He could not see Bolivar's face. Together they shifted over the pile and counted it roughly in hundreds.

Then Mr Binns brought the other's mind back to the matter in hand.

"This bit of fun has saved us the trouble of digging any deeper," he said; "but we must widen

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

a bit, I reckon. Perhaps we'll tap another chest if we go down. We needn't leave any doubloons for Sammy, anyway. He won't want 'em."

"I no' kill Marse Martin now—me Gard, no!" swore Nicholas. "Ebberyting different now."

"You think that, old son?"

"I big man now—million time bigger man dan Marse Martin. I too big man to kill damn Che-che now. I too big to marry Annie now. I go to Barbados now and be somebody. All niggers somebody dar."

"Waal, I don't like going back on a plan once made, Nick."

"Dar no reason now. Why we kill de fellow if he not in our way no more? He nuffin now. I spit on him and old Solomon too. Dey trash."

"I'll smoke a cig and turn it over," said Bolivar. "I'll just stroll down the path and think round this. I never had no luck going back from a thing, once my mind was made up to do it."

"It's murder for nuffin if I kill Marse Brown now."

"I see that. You don't want his gurl and I don't want his lighters now. Maybe he'd better live. I'll just turn it over."

"I no' kill him whatever you say," answered Nicholas rather truculently. "I big man now an' yo' no' my boss no more."

"Quite right. I'm not telling you nothing. You're a very clever nigger—I always knew that."

Mr Binns departed to reflect; but it was not the fate of Samuel Martin that occupied his mind. In two minutes he had forgotten the existence of

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Samuel Martin. His accident appeared to have saved effectually; for the white man, of course, perceived the truth of what the black man had pointed out. But Mr Binns found himself inspired by thoughts of another sacrifice to Mammon. It irked him a great deal that the crowning event of his life should be shared with a chattering and very second-rate coloured person.

The tropic moon sailed clear of the eastern crags presently and the wonder of it brooded over that desert place. Radiance from on high poured down like silver rain and fringed the rustling palmetto with light and the palmesa with brilliance. The lake spread in one mysterious sheet of darkness without a ripple, and the reflected moon seemed to float, like a great golden lily, in the midst of it. Across the gloom of the banks the fire-flies flitted and wove a network of glittering threads through the forest.

Bolivar smoked several cigarettes, and his mind concentrated upon Marse Brown. Minor difficulties also presented themselves. How were they going to explain the find? People did not go out digging for treasure-trove in Grenada. Bolivar's instinct was to keep profound silence on the subject and ship off his gold as he might, without revealing it to a soul on the island. But such a plan would be impossible if Nick were to share the treasure. Mr Binns considered deeply, and presently he assured himself that it would be flouting Providence to let Nicholas have half the money.

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

He took stock of the scene, and knew exactly where he stood by the spectacle of the dead tree, now towering bright as silver under the moon.

"Be a man and not a darned idiot," said Mr Binns to himself. Then he slipped into the underwoods, took a wide turn, and peering upwards from time to time, that he might mark his way, made a detour through the jungle, and began to stalk his companion as a hunter stalks his game.

He went very slowly, and often stopped to move a broken stick or other obstacle from his path. The brilliant moon helped him, and poured light through the woods, while, with prodigious caution, he came nearer and nearer to the great stone in the clearing, and the hole that was, after all, to be a grave.

He saw the rock at last looming ahead ; then Marse Brown helped to make his progress easier, for he began to sing. He was extemporising, and evidently in the best of spirits.

He, too, had forgotten the existence of Samuel Martin.

"Whar yo' gone, yo' Bolivar? Whar yo' gone, yo' Bolivar? If yo' not come back berry soon, I run off wid all de doubloon!" warbled Nicholas ; and Mr Binns, availing himself of the melody, pushed forward rapidly, and was behind the rock before the negro drew breath. He heard Marse Brown chinking the gold ; then he cocked his revolver and crept on his stomach to the edge of the boulder.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Half-a-mile away there marched solemnly Marse Martin to his ordeal. He carried a big stick, but no other weapon, save his own unconquerable belief in righteousness. Already the Grand Étang had glinted in his eyes as he walked the white footpath. He was calm and untroubled, for he felt not the least fear and had no belief whatever in the Mother of the Rain. But then, mellowed by distance, he heard the sound of singing. There could be no doubt about it. Some sort of melody floated to Samuel's ears, and he stood still and his jaw fell.

For a few moments he did not move; then he gripped his stick, shut his mouth, and pushed forward briskly.

"I in de Lord's hands," said Marse Martin to himself, "an', wedder or no, de Spirit nebber known to be cross wid a good, religious pusson."

He stood again to listen, but the drone of the song had stopped.

"Berry like it a frog," he told himself.

He was within two hundred yards of the lake when another unexpected sound fell on his ear, for he heard the thin, whip-like crack of small-arms. Little in itself, the noise was caught up by the hills and echoed, back and forward, from one side of the lake to the other. A second shot followed; then came an interval of twenty seconds and a third and last shot rang out.

Though amazed at such an astounding incident, Martin felt no alarm before it. Where there was a revolver, there were men; and he was a white

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

man's son and did not fear men. He ran as fast as he could in the direction of the shots, and presently smelt gunpowder in the still air and saw a little, flat layer of smoke hanging low over the jungle on the left of the path. But all was silent.

What had happened may be soon told. As Binns lifted his revolver, the man he meant to murder had heard a sound, and chanced to be looking exactly where the other lay concealed. Then Nicholas saw the moonlight flash on the barrel and the hand that held it. His mind moved quickly and his body too. He leapt up, and so got the first bullet in his shoulder instead of his head. A strong and heavy man, he knew that if he could reach the traitor he might yet save himself; but as he came, with a rush like a bull, Binns fired again, and hit Nicholas through his lung above the heart. The wound was mortal, yet it did not drop the negro, and Bolivar, being on his stomach at the time, could not escape. Marse Brown fell on him, bleeding at the breast and mouth, and in his dying agony crushed Binns like a dead stick under him, tore the revolver out of his hand and fired it into his face. The pair thus perished simultaneously, and their death occupied far less time than it takes to record it.

Marse Martin, guided by the smoke, crept to the scene of the tragedy, and there, in the little clearing under the great stone, the moonlight showed him two blood-spattered corpses gripped together, a big hole in the ground and a pile of

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

glittering gold. He rubbed his eyes, called upon his Saviour to protect him, and examined the dead men. He recognised them, stood for ten minutes staring at the treasure, then smelled the reek of the shambles and shivered.

He touched nothing, and by two o'clock in the morning had aroused the police of St George. Hereafter the forensic and detective skill of Grenada was occupied with the incident for many days. Certain points appeared sufficiently clear. One or both of the dead men had found a treasure, and one, in murdering his rival, or accomplice, had also met his own death. Bolivar Binns was known to possess the revolver, and the accepted theory of what had happened came very near to the fact. But how the precious pair had discovered the money could not be easily learned, though even this accident, thanks to certain testimony, was guessed at.

The old negro who waited on Binns made a confession. Eavesdropping, he had heard his master and Nicholas Brown plotting to do away with somebody. Who the victim might be he knew not; and having ascertained so much, he grew frightened for himself, and kept silent for fear of trouble. The ancient was intelligent, and his explanation seemed to fit the facts. For in connection with it there came out the midnight visit of Samuel to the lake and the knowledge that Nicholas Brown desired to replace him in the affection of Annie Solomon.

Samuel, then, it was who should have perished

THE MOTHER OF THE RAIN

but for the accident of the doubloons; and the men who dug his grave for him were now in their own.

"It all come 'long ob me being such a mighty good pusson," explained Marse Martin to his future grandfather-in-law after his great escape. "When tiefs fall out, dat's whar de honest folk come in. An' de money mine by de law ob de land, 'cause I de last live man who found it, an' no man hab no claim—dey 'splain all at de Government House to-day."

"De Mudder ob de Rain done ebberyting, Samuel," said old Pete, "an' don't yo' forget it."

"Dat so—under de Lord, massa—under de Lord. But me and Annie, we always berry civil to de lady—I promise dat, sar."

VII

HIGH TIDE

I MISSED my steamer at Georgetown on Demerara river and shipped in a tramp for Trinidad, where there was a chance of overtaking the passenger boat. She had a start, but would be at Port of Spain for forty-eight hours. Thus it came about I fell in with old Skipper Benny Blake and spent some invigorating hours in his company. He had followed the sea for fifty-five years and enjoyed various experiences; but there is one little narrative I always remember with entertainment. It brings back Benny's grizzled face and his cocked eye under its white eyebrow, his sing-song voice and his healthy enjoyment of the tale. And since the yarn went into my notebook straight from Benny's lips, his story of the high tide may still retain a little of the weather-bitten veteran, who told it on the bridge of his cargo boat while we plodded north through a rough blue sea.

It followed another—of taking time by the forelock and seizing an unexpected opportunity—and my comment reminded Captain Blake of his earlier adventure.

“‘There is a tide in the affairs of men,’” I quoted, and he admitted it literally.

HIGH TIDE

"There may be sure enough. I remember one such tide mighty well and, taken at the flood, it led not to fortune exactly, though it helped in that direction for me and my brother, Billy. 'Twas I took that tide, and when I tell about it, I can always see, out of the tail of my eye, that nobody believes—yet true as gospel is the yarn.

"Me and my brother was born in Georgetown you must know, of a white father and an octoroon mother. There ain't much of the tar-brush in me, though Billy showed more of it. I went to the sea at ten years old, but he was a land bird and hadn't no use for a ship. We both got on very well and was out in the world before our parents died. By that time, at five and twenty, I had a master's ticket and commanded a little coasting schooner as traded along the Guianas—British, Dutch and French; and Billy had drifted into French country and got a nice bit of cane-growing ground, inland from Sinnamarie. 'Twas a new settlement then, for this happed nearly half-a-century agone, though quite a busy little hole nowadays; but then the port weren't much more than a bit of a pier up in the river-mouth and fifty ramshackle houses and stores dumped round it. Up country they was opening out pretty brisk, and Billy had got a lot of ground cleared and plenty of cane. He was saving money, and had a wife and four kiddies by the time he was six and twenty.

"We met now and again, for my tub, the *Firefly*, traded up and down, and he'd come to the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

port to see me sometimes, and now and again I'd go up country to him, twenty miles inland, and have a look at his place and his family. A little light railway, that started from the wharf-head, ran you up, and his land was but two miles from the terminus, so he got his cane down the country easy enough, for he didn't make sugar—he sent all his stuff to Cayenne for that.

"And there came a time when I found Billy terrible excited and above himself, for the chap on the next lot to his had dropped sudden of yellow fever, and his ground was to be sold at auction in six weeks from that date. 'Twas a very fine piece, twice as big and twice as fat as my brother's, and he was death on getting it if he had to mortgage the shirt on his back. Well, I believed in him, and knew no smarter man was earning his living in them parts, and I promised he should have my savings on top of his own if they'd help him to bid high enough. For I was a bachelor then, and ever remained so, along of no feeling for the married state and never having struck a female as seemed exactly a head and shoulders above the rest of her sex. And Billy was properly grateful and reckoned that, if only the matter didn't get wind too far, he'd just about land the estate with what he could offer.

"So it stood, and I was glad to be making for Sinnamarie again at the time of the sale, and hoped to hear the good news that my brother had got the property. But that happened on the voyage down to fill me with fear, for a man went

HIGH TIDE

with me from Surinam in Dutch Guiana—a fat, noisy Hollander—and long before I knew anything about his business I hated the chap, because he was vain and a boaster and wondered how anybody in his right mind could take to the sea for a living. He was my only passenger, and not until we ran into a calm ten miles from our port did I hear what brought him to Sinnamarie. Then he cussed the *Firefly*, as though 'twas her fault the wind had given out, and explained he was due to a sale up country for a bit of land. He'd got wind of the estate next my brother's lot, and he meant to have it.

"There'll only be some local mongrels and niggers up there," he said, "and it's going cheap as dirt no doubt. But I've got advice that the ground's worth a lot more than it will fetch, and a bargain's what I'm out for. Nobody knows I'm coming, so I shall just pop in and snatch up the ground for a song."

"My heart stood still, and for once in my life I didn't whistle for wind. It came, however, and by morning we were on our way again. So I was up against it. If I landed this oily beast, it was good-bye to the estate for Billy, and if I did not, it was good-bye to my command for me. I couldn't make any bones about that, so I did my duty, of course, and in due time we fetched port, ran alongside the jetty and began to break out our cargo as usual.

"I had no power to let Billy know, for there weren't any telegraph nor nothing at that time.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

And though I might have gone up in the little one-hoss train with the enemy next morning, it wouldn't have helped us if I had. The sale would take place at ten o'clock on the following day, you see, and the problem for me was how to keep this pig from Surinam out of our way till the job were through.

"Well, sharp though my wits used to be in them days, they weren't sharp enough to solve that riddle without a bit of help from nature. I figured it out against the Dutchman every way, because he was a stuck-up swine without any heart, or manners, and I'd have been well pleased to best the beggar for no other reason than that I didn't like him. But far more than that hung to it, and when I thought of my brother, there weren't no shadow in my mind against chousing the enemy if I could. But how?

"We came in after noon on the top of the tide and ran our nose over the little quay as usual, and I mind when we knocked off work for the night, that me and my mate—Nathan Sales he was, and went down in the *Star of Bethlehem* six years after—we sat for'ard smoking and I told him my trouble, and that, so sure as our passenger went up country in the morning train, so sure my brother would be outbid for the precious land.

"He couldn't see no way out of it and we were just going ashore to stretch our legs presently, when the train came down from the interior and ran into the station shed at the harbour mouth. A little toy thing 'twas, and made up for size

HIGH TIDE

with noise and stink of coco-nut oil ; and behind it came the rolling stock—all there was on the blessed line in them days—two passenger cars and three goods trucks. We was looking at it when my Dutchman came along with his portmanteau.

“ ‘I must sleep in the ship, Skipper,’ he says. ‘There’s no place for a gentleman to put up here and nothing for a gentleman to eat. So I’ll have dinner and bed and breakfast aboard.’

“ ‘You’re welcome,’ I answers, and he went in the ship. As for me and Sales, we poked about and found there was only one train up and one train down the line a day. She’d start next morning at nine o’clock, in time to take the Dutchman up to the auction.

“ We watched them heave round the engine on a turn-table ; then they raked out her fire and left her alongside the quay while night came down, and I remember very well eating my supper along with the Dutchman and how, afterwards, he smoked a whacking cigar out of his case, and praised it, but didn’t offer me one. He bragged and gassed till ’twas all I could do to keep from hitting him over the ear-hole ; but I got a bit of satire in at last and told him that for bounce and brag I’d never seen his equal in the Guianas. Then he turned nasty at once and said that weren’t the way for sailorsmen to treat passengers, and he’d write to the owners and take a bit of trouble that I heard of it again.

“ ‘I’m somebody and you’re less than nobody,’

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

he said, ‘and no man insults me, but gets the worse end of it in the long run. You’ve done for yourself now, you sea-faring fool!’

“Then he went to his cabin aft and I saw no more of him.

“Sales was on deck and I spoke a strong thing to the man when I joined him. A night of stars it was and a falling tide. The docks were deserted, and we seemed to be in a sort of black hole, with a rough edge of palm-trees showing where the land stopped and the sky began.

“‘Nathan,’ I said, ‘I’d sell my soul to the dowl to be level with that hog.’

“‘I know,’ he answered. ‘I wish I could help you ; but, without violence, we could do nought, and violent we cannot be, because duty’s duty all the time. If you’d kept friends, you might have poured the whisky down his neck and got him so dead to the world that he wouldn’t have woke in time to start to-morrow.’

“‘He’s not that sort,’ I told Sales. ‘He could drink me under the table—such a barrel as he’s got—if he was minded to.’

“Then suddenly we heard a bit of a jolt for’ard, and looking over, we see a curious thing. The tide was falling, and we was falling with it, and our bowsprit was coming down on the little light engine drawn up on the railway line under our nose. ’Twas a bit of a surprise in a way, for I had never marked before there was such a proper drop in the tide at this place, and to find our bowsprit, as had been twenty feet above the quay

HIGH TIDE

down to ten or thereabout, astonished me. There wasn't a minute to lose, so Sales blew his whistle and our crew of five tumbled up quick from their cards in the fo'c'sle. Then we got ashore and with a pull all together cleared the engine out of the way.

"We thought no more of the incident, except to cuss the nigger fireman and stoker, and we was back again, and just going to turn in, when Providence at last came to the rescue. Like a stroke of lightning it flashed upon me, and I gave such a jump that I was nearly overboard.

"'I've got it !' I said to Sales.

"'So it seems,' he answered. 'What 'ave you got—St Vitus's dance ?'

"'No,' I told him. 'I've got the way to clear that blighter's pitch to-morrow. Call the hands and tell 'em to be as quiet as dead men. This'll be an extra rum ration and half-a-quid all round I shouldn't wonder.'

"Then I stepped into my deckhouse cabin and lit a lamp and looked up the tides. It only wanted that, and when I saw nature was going to be on our side, I went ahead and gived about the strangest orders that ever a crew heard from their skipper's lips. Not an order neither, but a request ; for I got 'em together, told 'em how the land lay, and said they could do me a proper good turn if they so willed and a favour I shouldn't forget. But I pointed out there was a bit of danger and that what I was after couldn't be reconciled nohow with law and order. I said there was a bright side to that also, because, in

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

the first place, if we all lied like one man, the port authorities could do nought, and, in the second place, if assault and battery was proved against us, I'd take the blame on my own shoulders and stand the racket as it was my duty to do.

"They shied at assault and battery, however, being very good, sober men with never a black mark against one of 'em; but I explained my meaning.

"'We ain't going to assault a human,' I said; 'and for that matter there's nobody but the night-watchman within half-a-mile of the wharf. But what I'm out for is the engine yonder. 'Tis like this here,' I said. 'Without that loco' the train can't go to-morrow morning, and if the train don't go, then this Dutch swine snoring aft won't go neither; and then my brother's all right for the land. Without the engine the game is up.'

"They wanted to know what I was going to do against the engine and didn't seem easy in their minds till I explained.

"'Bless your life, I wouldn't touch a hair of the engine's head,' I told em; 'but this I'd do: I'd just make it a dead cert that the nine o'clock train don't start on the morn. Their engine shall be sound in wind and limb and ready and willing to set sail at half after ten or later; but not a minute sooner. We'll do a dashing deed,' I said, 'and we'll use the hawser from the quay—then who's going to say who 'twas? In two hours,' I told the boys, 'the tide will turn, and in three

HIGH TIDE

hours we can run the engine under our bowsprit, where 'twas a bit ago. Then we can get a hitch round the beggar and make fast to our stick, and the tide's going to do the rest. The tide suits something beautiful. 'Tis full at seven-thirty o'clock in the morning, and at that hour the engine will be fifteen feet off the rails and taking the air up aloft. And she can't come down again till nearer ten than nine.'

"They laughed and was in it up to the neck right away. Only Sales had a fear we'd hurt the *Firefly*; but I knew she were all right and could have lifted the whole of their toy train on her nose if we wanted for to do so. But we ran a stay or two down from the foremast to help the bowsprit do the job; and then, when the tide came, we worked like white men and got the engine in its place and, with a hawser from the harbour, took a good half-dozen turns under her belly and made her fast.

"The night-watchman was an old nigger known to me, and I went to see him so as there shouldn't be no trouble there; but I found the ancient man sound asleep on a pile of coco-nut trash, so never had no difficulty with him. He woke just at dawn and no doubt thought he'd lost the use of his wits when he doddered round and found the railway engine looking down at him from our bowsprit; but 'twas eight feet above his head by then and still soaring to heaven. And when he shouted out and woke the ship, a more surprised and shocked man than Sales, or an angrier man

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

than me, you couldn't picture. And meantime the sun rose, and the tide rose, and the *Firefly* rose, and the engine also rose till she was dangling very near twenty feet above the rails!

"Then the harbour-master came along—a Frenchman he was—and listened to me; and I told him that never since I went to sea had a more disgraceful thing been done to a ship, and I demanded that the culprits should be brought to justice, and swore if my schooner was damaged, or so much as a stay started, I'd have the law of his Government. I even threatened to cut the engine loose and let her rip to blazes; but that the frightened man prayed me not to do.

"And when I'd lost my wind, then Sales got on the harbour-master. The man spoke English pretty well, and he swore from the first that nobody in Sinnamarie would have done such a thing for money, let alone any smaller inducement. And presently the fireman and his stoker came to get up steam, and found their blessed loco' floating like a bird in the morning sun; and to see that brace of niggers was worth all the trouble in itself. And then my Dutchman turned out; but he was only interested in his breakfast and didn't know the jolt in store for his nerves till I came along to the top of the table and broke the bad news.

"He scowled at me and no doubt expected me to be glum after our row the night before; but, on the contrary, he found me amazing friendly, and terrible sorry for him, and very indignant that he should have had his little voyage for nothing.

HIGH TIDE

"‘ You haven’t heard the shocking news,’ I said, ‘ but a bit of wicked mischief was hatched by some unknown blackguard boys last night, and the rascals hitched the railway engine to my bowsprit, and these here high tides have done the rest. An’ I’m a lot put about for you ; but you’ll understand, of course, that your quarrel is with the shore people, not the ship.’

“‘ What does this tomfoolery matter to me ? ’ he asked, and I had the pleasure of explaining.

“‘ It matters like this,’ I said. ‘ There’s only one engine on their little road, and as that engine is playing at being a pelican for the minute, there won’t be no train up country in time for the auction. So you won’t be there, and in fact you’ve had your trip for nought but the pleasure of my company.’

“ I hadn’t broke the news till it was well in for nine o’clock, and he rushed out then and stormed and cussed and had everybody by the ears. But nobody gave a damn for him—least of all the engine. She was having the time of her life and didn’t show no inclination to come down and get to work ; and when the tide fell presently and she returned to the rails, ‘twas nearly ten o’clock.

“ At a bit after eleven she started, and I went in her to see how things had gone with my brother, Billy. And the Dutchman went too, in hope he might yet get the ground out of the purchaser with a bit of added money.

“ But once more the luck was against the creature. Billy had grabbed the estate all right,

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

for even less than he hoped, and wasn't tempted to sell again though my passenger offered good money. And when the fat fellow found it was a relation of mine had the land, he tumbled to the game all right. He had to sail with me two days later, because there weren't any other way home; but not a word he spoke till he was on the gangway going off.

"Then he told me what he thought of me, and I never heard a stronger expression of opinion nastier put.

"He wrote to my masters also; but it's everybody for himself in the shipping trade, and as they reckoned I was more use to 'em than the Dutchman could be, they just whispered a word of warning in my ear and left it at that."

VIII

MONSIEUR PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

i

PROFESSOR FROST, the distinguished biologist and curator of Barbados Natural History Museum, was going to St Thomas, in the Northern Islands, for a holiday, and as the station ship which bore him put in at St Lucia for some hours, he had welcomed the opportunity to renew acquaintance with a kindred spirit. For near Castries there dwelt Monsieur Achille Pons, a West Indian, whose family had been connected with the island for a century—back to pre-British days, when St Lucia belonged to France. He was wealthy, amiable and generous. All men liked him and had a good word to say of him. Indeed Monsieur Pons, though a Latin, chose to be more English than the English. He had married an English wife, the daughter of the Commandant in times past; but now she was dead and, as a man of middle age, Monsieur Pons dwelt alone with two of the aboriginal yellow Caribs to look after him.

"They are scarce in the land nowadays," he explained to the Professor after an excellent luncheon.

"Tell me about them, and give me another

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

slice of that delicious black pine. There are no such pines in Barbados," answered his friend.

Achille cut a circular slice from the pine-apple and proceeded.

"The more one hears of those cannibal Caribs, the better one likes them."

"It is always the way with you mild-mannered men to love ferocity in others."

"They were a fine race — fearless, heroic, patriotic—the most powerful of all the so-called South American Indian tribes. Their manners and customs show originality. They were wont to paint the skeletons of their dead ancestors artistically and hang them in their lodges. They themselves wore little but a coat of vermillion dye ; but they skewered their cheeks and ears and noses—doubtless to break their monotony of facial expression."

"You love a joke still, my friend."

The Frenchman's eyes twinkled and he stroked his black beard, but his rather melancholy voice did not change note.

"Endurance was their peculiar virtue, and the private individual who aspired to leadership was called to show the tribe that he could survive the very extremity of physical suffering. To do so your neophyte would sit down in the nests of the white ant, abstain from food and drink, inflict horrible tortures upon himself. That Spartan spirit resisted civilisation to the end, and the last sad chapter of their annals, as a nation, finds them in Grenada leaping one by one from

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

a precipice into the sea. For they had found by that time how death was kinder and honester than the French. A handful only are left scattered through the islands. Surely Nature wept to see her simple children destroyed."

They smoked and drank coffee on the piazza presently, and the Professor's eyes ranged over the mountain glories of St Lucia.

"I think each islet the most beautiful, until I reach the next," he said. "These Northern Lesser Antilles, as they rise over the sea like clouds, and grow green and fertile and tower their verdure-clad sides into the grey and golden mists that hide their peaks—these islands, my dear Pons, strongly support the view of Ignatius Donelly, who held that this semicircle of dry land is no more than the fragments of a vast continent—Atlantis—now submerged beneath the waves."

"The lunatic who said Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare. Spare me, dear friend. No theory of that man could commend itself to me."

A warning gun bellowed from far distant.

"Alas, I must return," said the Professor. "The ship is calling."

"Stop with me on your way back," suggested M. Pons ; but that the other could not do.

"I go from St Thomas to Jamaica," he said. "But I shall come again some day. And meantime, why not visit Barbados and see the museum ?"

They walked together down the hill to Castries from the shelf of Morne Fortuné, where the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Frenchman's villa stood. Far beneath lay the little port, hemmed in on one side by low-lying land covered with coco-nut palms; on the other, by the towering terraces of the mountain. Even yet upon its verdant acclivities might be observed steep grass-grown tracks cut through the woods.

Achille pointed them out.

"Up those slopes were dragged the mighty cannon that now occupy the forts aloft and make us impregnable," he said. "Have you ever considered how, in past time, one French bullet might have altered the entire history of your glorious nation, Professor? No? Yet, when my countrymen and yours were at grips over this islet, among those who took an active part in the storming of this great hill during 1794 was no less a person than His Grace the Duke of Kent—future father of Victoria."

He took off his hat at the royal name, and the Professor, who was not interested in these matters, fell back upon a former topic.

"You won't forget the snake, will you—*Trigonocephalus Lanceolatus*? If by happy chance you can secure one alive for our collection, the gift shall be duly and thankfully acknowledged."

"Be sure I shall not forget. They are not so rare as one could wish. Fer-de-lance, as we call him, still occurs in my own garden sometimes. A negress perished of one only last month and a planter lost his life in the same way six months ago."

"Perhaps the most poisonous thing on earth,"

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

said Frost. "Cribo—the black snake—is pretty bad, and the red coral snake of Trinidad takes some beating; but fer-de-lance—there is no venom to my knowledge that works with such awful swiftness. I want him for experiments."

"You shall have him, Professor, if I can catch him without the necessity of slaying him. But don't be sanguine. One takes no chances with fer-de-lance."

They walked towards the wharf, and as they did so a bullet-headed, blond man, broad and powerful, met Monsieur Pons. He laughed rather boisterously in their faces and appeared on familiar terms with the Frenchman.

"Excuse my amusement, mon père," he said; "but you and your friend are such a contrast!"

This could not be denied, for Pons was very tall and very thin, with a long, melancholy face, while the Professor appeared to be all Panama hat and cummerbund, and his red, white-whiskered and genial countenance shone like the sun between them.

"My son-in-law," said Achille stiffly. "This is Peter Pratt, who married my daughter, Stella."

"Lucky man," declared the Professor, shaking hands. "I remember her quite well—a star indeed. A dainty girl five years ago, now doubtless a lovely woman."

"So she is," answered Stella's husband; "but she's got her father's melancholy nature, Professor Frost, and I'm a laughter-lover. Life is difficult, and you can only live it by laughing at it."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"It's a good rule to laugh at yourself, but not at other people," answered the learned man.

They chatted as they went to the wharf, and the visitor noticed that his friend no longer contributed to the conversation.

Peter had apparently struck him dumb.

The young man aired his opinions and exhibited the spectacle of a selfish and rather coarse-minded youth. He cursed a negro who accidentally got in his way, and with a leer he drew the Professor's attention to a fine mulattress. Achille bade his friend an affectionate farewell, and hardly was the little man off to join the steamer when Pratt's expression changed. He slapped his white ducks with a cane that he carried and accosted his father-in-law bluntly.

"I wish to God you'd talk sense to Stella," he said. "I'm sick to death of her airs and graces. We've been married a year now, and, upon my soul, I shake in my shoes to look forward."

The other's dark eyes flashed, but he spoke mildly for his daughter's sake. She had fallen in love with the Englishman, who came from home as overseer to large plantations, and Peter, returning her passion very heartily, won her before he had been six months at Castries. Her father was only concerned for his girl's happiness, and, being no student of character, had supposed the young man what at first he appeared—a typical, bluff Briton, honourable, hard-working and sagacious. But Peter, to gain his own ends, had played a part and the Frenchman was

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

deceived. With a very keen eye to the main chance, Pratt did begin by working hard, but honourable he was not, and sagacious he could not claim to be, though not devoid of craft. Finding Stella beautiful and talented, the only daughter of her father and an heiress, he had wasted no time, and it was not until after they were married that she found he had jilted a girl at home for her sake, and that his love fell far short of her maiden ideal and his own assurances. He proved hard-hearted, sensual and vicious. His energies he devoted to his work and his amusements; but the latter were such that his wife could enjoy no part in them. He possessed an attraction for a sort of woman. He had ruined one home already, and the better people recognised him only for the sake of Pons and his daughter.

Achille now made answer.

"I, too, look forward sadly," he said. "It is not Stella's fault that she is melancholy, Peter. She has enough to make her. I am a Frenchman, and no Frenchman can be a prude; but there are limits to conduct, even in the West Indies, and you do not respect them, or treat your wife as a gentleman should."

"If a woman can't keep her husband out of other people's houses, the fault is hers," answered Pratt sullenly. "She's changed, not I. I thought she'd be my life and soul, and throw herself into my work and see with my eyes. Damn it all, I'm young; I can't sit at home every night and hear

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

her sing silly songs. She's so beastly shy—hates cards and company and every sort of fun."

"She never hated company before she was married, and she has an excellent sense of humour. But she chose her friends among her equals, and she has not lost her friends. It is you who make them unwelcome. You allow yourself great liberty of speech, Peter, and refined men and women do not like it. Would you behave in your mother's drawing-room at home as you behave in Stella's here?"

"I'm a plain-spoken man and I hate humbug. Let's have reality and be natural. Stella is so damned finicking and affected."

"It is idle to talk, and noise will not convince me," answered the other mildly. "You were well educated. You mixed with good, honourable men at Oxford, if you tell the truth. You know as well as I do that you are not leading a life that a white man ought to lead. You are, in fact, living a very dangerous life, because you will presently lose your self-respect; and that is ruin."

"You won't help Stella by cursing me," answered the young man violently. "If she wants to be happy, she must be sensible and remember it takes all sorts to run the world. I don't prevent her from asking her friends to Villa Caprice. In future I'll be out of the way when they turn up. I always like to shock these nice, superior people. And, in return, she can keep out of the way when my pals come. That's fair give-and-take

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

anyway. I don't want to quarrel with her, God knows. Why should I? I love her; but because you love a woman, that's no reason why you should let her dust the floor with you."

"And no reason why you should dust the floor with her, my friend. Stella is proud. You have insulted her on several occasions. You have threatened her love. But she is very long-suffering, Peter."

"Well, I'll revive her love again if I can. I'll take in a reef and see if I can't please her. But how? Tell me how, mon père."

"Nothing could be easier to a decent man. She is not exacting. Respect and honour her as she deserves to be respected and honoured. Turn over a new leaf and remember your vows."

"All right, all right. I'm a good sort, you know. I mean well. I'll try to please her harder; and I hope she'll try to please me. She's got a false idea of what men are and what they want and will have."

He swung away without more words, and Achille Pons looked after him. Then he spat on the ground, and the expression upon his face belied his gentle and reasonable words.

"Dog of a dog!" he said to himself as he turned to climb the hill to his home.

An old Carib, called Jock, met him with a piebald pony and Monsieur Pons mounted, while the servant walked beside him. The Indian had been in the employ of Achille's father before him.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Missy at home," he said. "Missy Stella. She come just after you go out wid little gem'man."

The pony, used to the great hill, walked steadily upward, and Pons, with his long legs hanging down on either side, was buried in thought and saw not the familiar scene unfolding round him. He passed wonderful blue valleys and ravines with luxurious growth of palm and mango, breadfruit and cocoa. The sides of the mountain above cultivation were clothed with tangles of creeper and lichen, twining from one tropical giant to another. Little dog pines hung aloft, with aigrettes of jade-green foliage. The fans of the palms were blazing with light and showered it down, like gold, into the heart of the woods. The sunshine splashed and chequered the tawny ground and set the hot air throbbing. Vistas of purple shade broke to the right and left of the way, and white villas glittered in them, or basked under the eye of the westering sun. Negro huts also, brown as beehives, broke the green amid their patches of bananas, sweet potatoes and pigeon peas.

Where the fine stone dwelling of Achille Pons stood, on a great plateau with its back to the forest, a girl appeared, saw her father, and hastened to welcome him.

Stella Pratt was a beauty with complexion pale, but pure. She had her father's gentle and ruminating eyes, but was moulded more vigorously and displayed a handsome figure and a wealth of splendid chestnut hair. She

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

shared the benevolent and amiable disposition of Monsieur Pons, and her husband's criticism belied her, for Stella was not by nature of a mournful disposition. But she had been educated by a mother with a soul, and to the best of her limited opportunities sought art and all softening and ennobling influences. She was a devout Catholic, and religion meant more to her than her father. That splendid young animal, Peter, had won her by his vigour and frankness; and her love, aided by his own cunning, had blinded her to his faults. He had pretended interest in seemly subjects to win her. But, despite some harsh rebuffs, she loved him still, and hoped to lift him presently to share her higher pleasures and take a worthier view of his own responsibilities.

Achille kissed her and found her cheerful.

"I've been taking a long ride," she said, "and couldn't pass, so came to give you your tea. Has Professor Frost gone?"

"He has left a kindly message for you. Then I met Peter, and I may tell you, Stella, that I gave him a good talking to."

She grew serious.

"Poor Peter—if I only knew how to make him happier!"

"He'll never be happier till he's wiser," answered her father. "You married an animal when you thought, and I thought, that you were marrying a man. The question is, can we turn this animal into a man? I begin to fear not."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"He's adorable sometimes," she said. "I believe he's two men rolled into one."

"I rated him soundly. I did not mince words."

"I should like to hear you rating anybody soundly."

They looked out over the deep blue bays divided by wooded promontories and fringed with silver sands. A strong wind came off the sea, swaying through the forests beneath them and cooling the air as the sun began to sink. The purple of the sea was flecked with foam and, far away, reduced to a spot, the steamer proceeded north, leaving a trail of smoke behind her.

At tea Achilles poke again of his son-in-law.

"He has promised amendment. That was something. He means to turn over a new leaf. We are patient and we will be hopeful, my Star."

"And I will do my part," said Stella. "He likes horrid things; but if the horrid things hurt nobody, then he must have them. He wants a gramophone and plenty of noisy melodies. It will be a trial, but if the dreadful machine keeps him at home I can endure it."

"He shall have a gramophone. Tell him that I am going to buy the best that can be got in Europe."

She kissed him and blessed him.

"And I will do my part," she repeated. "I have got you, dad, and you are wise and understand everything and everybody. I'm learning to play bridge, too. Isn't it noble of me?"

"An angel could do no more," he declared.

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

"We will live in hope. I am only concerned for your health and spirits. If they fail—then you must leave him, Stella."

"Never, never," she owed. "'For better, for worse.' I'll be a good wife—as good as I know how to be, at any rate—whatever he is."

"Pearls before swine," he muttered to himself, but too low for her to hear.

Then Stella mounted her pony; but as she was starting he bade her wait a moment.

"Take him a box of the cigars he loves, with my compliments. The big Coronas. That shall be the jam to the powder I gave him this afternoon."

"He likes them better than anything in the world but me," declared the girl, and presently rode away with fifty of the finest cigars that Havana had ever grown.

ii

Time passed, and even Stella's unconquerable hope was clouded and her patience tortured to the breaking-point. Peter did not improve, nor did he make any serious effort to do so. Hopeless differences, radical and fundamental, obtained between the pair. The girl was refined, cultured, and simple in her tastes and pleasures; the man had no moral sense and wallowed in the sty for choice. Even his own selfish ambitions to prosper and his desire towards affluence and power began to wither under his appetites—those scorching passions that can devour all hope of a man, as with fire, and leave him ashes fit only for the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

earth. A northern climate and strict control might have saved Peter Pratt ; but the fierce domination of tropical temperatures and the temptations of his present existence worked his ruin and acted as fuel to all that was worthless in his nature.

They had reached a pass when his wife's attempts to please him angered him more than her tears. He was growing indifferent even to her beauty, and while this was a negative blessing, a new terror presently overtook Stella, for Peter began to drink too many cocktails. For the first time in her life she had seen him intoxicated, and fled from him to her father.

But after that incident the man expressed abject contrition and promised to reform. Stella forgave him quickly enough, and for a time reported improvement. With more love than sense she worried him by her ministrations, and herself gave up all stimulant, in futile hope to help him. Still she clung to him and was quick to see fancied amelioration. But her father knew more about Peter than did his wife, and there came a day, at the Club House, when personal friends revealed secrets of the young man's activities that robbed Monsieur Pons of his last hope.

Yet, despite the fact of this dire information, Achille retained his gentle and tranquil habit of speech. None heard him say a hard word, or express more than acute suffering. Indeed, his friends marvelled a little that he should exercise such self-restraint. Perhaps he was too occupied

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

with the future to be angry. Indeed, any outward expression of anger under any circumstances was foreign to his nature. His thoughts were wholly occupied with Stella now, for the more unbearable became her lot, the more steadfast was she to bear it.

The inevitable day dawned when Peter struck her. He hit her with his open hand across the face, and his signet ring cut her cheek. For a moment she flamed and smote him back with a torrent of fiery words. She lashed him, laid his dirty soul bare, and showed him the cur that he was and the fate he deserved.

Had she stopped there, she might have done him good, and even brought him to his senses; but she spoiled all by sentiment, and ended by weeping and asking him to forgive her harsh words.

The secret of his blow she kept to herself, and did not again see her father until the cut was healed; but Monsieur Pons heard of it from a friend, and the news came to him by letter.

It was his custom to take his morning mail to his bathroom, where he drank a cup of coffee, sat in warm water, ate a mango or two, and read what the post might bring. This had been his habit for twenty years, and now, the mango eaten and his beard and moustache brushed clean, he dried his hands and read the tragic news of Stella's suffering. His friend was a woman, and had heard of Peter's outrage from a black servant at Villa Caprice.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Achille dropped the letter over the edge of his bath, lay back and blinked, where the morning sun was darting golden rays into the bathroom, between the wings of the jalousies that took the place of a window.

His spirits fell and also rose, for it seemed impossible that Stella could suffer this crowning insult and not return to her father, to leave him no more. "It is Christianity gone mad to endure the wretch another day," he reflected. The matter was a fortnight old when he learned it, and now he guessed why his daughter had delayed unusually long to see him. Yet her letters—for she wrote when she did not come—were cheerful, and she had not mentioned her husband in them.

The bather reflected, and sighed so deeply that the water in which he lay rippled on his hairy chest. Then he lifted his long, bony figure, and was just about to emerge and begin the painful business of the day, when that happened to arrest his attention completely and banish from his mind even Stella and her present griefs.

Into his paradise of a bathroom, with its white marble floor and tank, sweet with the odours of orange blossom, musical with the rustle of bamboos outside the window, bright with sunshine and the gleam of purple and yellow convolvulus nodding through the jalousies, there had crept a serpent. No snake of the mind was it, but a little whip of living silver with a sharp snout and two steely eyes. The thing twisted its flat head quickly to the right and left, while from its mouth

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

trembled a tiny forked tongue. In another moment Pons would have put his foot upon it, where the creature had crept unseen to the side of the bath. Now he stopped in the water, and the snake, frightened by the splash, glided away into a corner. It was fer-de-lance—swift death to every living thing.

The Frenchman, judging the distance to the bathroom door, and not taking his eyes off the enemy, prepared to fly. But the snake moved and crawled towards the foot of the sunk bath, so Monsieur Pons remained a little longer where he was. Then, by good chance, the unconscious reptile made a move fatal to its own freedom, for beside the bath stood an open box with the hinged lid thrown back. It contained soap and some pieces of dry flannel, and into this lair fer-de-lance coiled his glittering body and disappeared.

Achille's mind moved quickly, and he took the slight risk still remaining. From his bath he crept, seized a long rafia, that was dry and stiff, then lifted the lid and dropped it before the snake had time to escape. The naked man breathed hard, and perspiration started from his forehead. But his triumph was complete. He had captured *Trigonocephalus* alive, and his thoughts were full of Professor Frost. At last he could gratify his friend's ambition, and, much elated, Achille dressed as quickly as possible and bore his imprisoned treasure away.

Jock, the old yellow Carib, heard the adventure and praised God for his master's escape ; while the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

captor, in some excitement, forgot trouble for a little while and considered the satisfaction of acquainting his friend with his success.

He had long since offered a reward for a specimen of the notorious reptile; but such was the snake's reputation that no nigger would seek him or come to close quarters with him if he could be avoided. They were occasionally killed, never captured.

But Achille's fleeting pleasure was quickly and cruelly clouded, for he had not finished his light breakfast before his daughter arrived, and in her face he read evil. The morning light made her look brighter than usual, but her eyes were full of pain under their aureole of red-gold, and upon her face sat an anxious and haggard expression. When her pony had been led away, Stella kissed her father and declared that she was well enough, but that the future held a new terror and untold disaster.

"I heard last night," she said. "Peter told me, and I have not slept. I came as quickly as I could to you."

"I know already," he answered. "He has nearly killed a negro, fighting about a woman."

"Not that, not that. The plantations. He heard privately yesterday that a man is coming from Barbados by the next boat to—to look into the accounts. The owners do not know that Peter knows this. Oh, father, it means ruin if you cannot help us!"

"How so, my dear? Drink your coffee and

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

eat your roll and honey. You are growing so thin that I shall soon see through you."

"Peter has used a great deal of money—borrowed it."

"For what purpose?"

"Never mind that now. We are faced with utter ruin and disgrace if you cannot save him. He will blow his brains out if you do not come to the rescue."

"If I thought that—but Peter is not the sort of young man who blows his brains out. Men who beat women never do so."

She started and blushed painfully.

"I did not want you to know," she said.

"Such things cannot be hid. There are people in this island, the humblest, who do not see a man strike a woman in the face and say nothing. We will leave that. He has friends, too, who have warned him what is coming, you say?"

"He is in debt to the company; but they will never understand."

"How much?"

"About two thousand pounds. He was going to pay it back in plenty of time; but an enemy must have spied upon him and written to England. Oh, father, it may be the turning-point if we save him now!"

"What of your allowance, Stella? You had your cheque not a month ago."

"It is spent," she said.

"But not by you?"

"Have mercy—this once. Help him for my

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

sake—for mother's sake! If this happens, it is all over; save him, and the terrible lesson will make him another man. I know—indeed it must!"

She flung herself on her knees beside him, and he was deeply stricken to see her suffering.

Inwardly he raged in a volcano of wrath, but what moved in his heart she knew not. He bent his head and kissed her; he put his arms round her and drew her head to his shoulder as a woman might have done.

"You brave child," he said. "You are wonderful; you are a great lesson to the world, and to me. Such living Christianity I have not known. This is to turn the other cheek to the smiter. It is beautiful so to do; but it is not life. It means death more probably. But it shall not be death for you. You have to think of your own honour and mine. Honour is a delicate thing. It cannot thus be dragged in the mire without perishing."

"Save him—save him!" she implored again. "Everybody hates him now, and he has done much evil; but this awful experience will surely turn him into a good man. There have been great men who began by doing wicked things and ended by being saints of the Church."

"You love him still?" he asked, guessing the answer; but she flushed again and did not reply as he expected.

"I do not love him any longer. I cannot lie to you—least of all now, when I am praying you for a mighty, mighty favour. I do not love him, but I am his wife, and I will fight for him till I die."

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

"No, you cannot lie; you are a ray of pure truth in a lying world," he answered.

Then he sighed deeply and was silent.

She did not plead any more with words, but remained within his arms and her beseeching eyes upon his face.

"Until seventy times seven," she said presently, and kissed him, and remained still with her eyes fixed upon him. He could see the scar on her cheek now.

Then, after a pause, a change came over him and he plunged into a mood that struck a note of levity by comparison with the scene that had passed.

"If I thought it would make him a good man instead of a vile one, I would give him all that I have and go and live in a negro cabin," he said.

"It must make him turn from wickedness. He is not a stone. No creature could escape such destruction as hangs over him now and not repent and strive to repay heaven—and you—by his actions."

"I have had an escape from death myself within the hour," returned Achille.

She was alarmed, and heard with deep emotion the story of the snake.

"Thank God!—thank God!" she cried. "If you had passed away I should have been alone in the world."

She prayed silently and offered up her gratitude to heaven; and he noticed that for a time the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

interest of the event helped her to forget her own troubles.

Then he brought her back to them.

"When one has seen Death and escaped from him with no more than a salute, it is well that we make thank-offering to what we hold most dear—is it not, Stella?"

Her eyes brightened.

"Thank-offering to one we hold most dear," he repeated.

He held her hand and did not speak again for some time.

"You must not leave me to-day," he declared presently. "I want you close to me all day."

"Then I will stop. Indeed I could not leave you. My mind is so quick. I seem to see dear old Jock coming down to tell me—oh, horrible—horrible—make me forget it! Nothing else matters, so that you are well and your dear, precious self."

He was looking far away with a strange expression in his eyes. For a time he seemed to forget her and everything. She prattled on, and then he came back from his meditations.

"To-day is Friday, and you will stop with me."

"And we will go to Mass together to-morrow morning."

"Things have fallen out conveniently, and Monsieur Fer-de-lance chose the right time for his visit. The home ship calls this afternoon for Barbados, so my friend shall start for Professor Frost presently."

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

They spent the morning together, and after luncheon Monsieur Pons went about his business in an old buggy which Jock, the Carib, drove.

"I shall be back to tea and shan't forget your husband. So be of good cheer and banish trouble. Your cigarettes are in my smoking-room."

He went off with packets and letters for the mail, and was gone a couple of hours. Then he came home again and embraced Stella affectionately. Over his cup of tea he made her heart glad.

"Fer-de-lance is on his way," he said ; "and I telegraphed to the Professor the nature of his visitor, for, had I written, he might have opened the parcel first and the letter afterwards. That done, and a box of mangoes—the 'number fours'—also dispatched to his lady, I went to my bankers, wrote a letter at the club, and finally sought your home, Stella. Peter I was not prepared to see to-day ; but I wrote to him from the club and left him a box of the Havanas also. The letter, however, will be more welcome than the tobacco ; it contains a cheque for two thousand pounds. Therefore, when you return to him to-morrow, you will return, not to an honest husband, but, at any rate, to a solvent one."

"How can I thank you, best and truest of fathers ?"

"It is not for you to thank me, but Peter," he answered. "Nor do I want words. He can only thank me in one way—by remembering the obligations of his position and behaving like a man rather than a brute. Leave him now—put him

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

out of your mind as though he were not. Be my girl again—if only for a little while. I told him you were stopping with me to-night, and also informed him that I had no wish for his company, so we shall not have a cloud on our evening. To-morrow I will take you back to Villa Caprice—God knows how unwillingly."

"You, who always do your duty, would not like to see me fail in mine," she said.

"What is man's good and what his evil—whereunto serveth he?" quoted Monsieur Pons.

For a time he became abstracted, then he spoke again.

"Come and choose a pine-apple for dinner," he said; "and you shall have a bottle of your own wine too—the sparkling Italian wine you used to love. I have a new case for you."

"I drink nothing now," she told him.

"But to-night you will," he promised. "There is no need to set me an example of temperance."

"None can set you an example," she said.

iii

Through the glory of the morning Stella and her father set out for Mass.

The crown of Morne Fortuné was buried in cloud and the rain fell lightly—a pride o' the morning shower. But soon the dawn touched the rolling grey caps of the mountain, and they blushed and brightened into a vision of pale rose behind the rain. Then the sun ascended, the tropical shower flashed like falling fire, and the

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

valleys, hills and sky were full of a great light. Over the blue waters of the Caribbean, painted on the rain, wide in arc, agleam with transparent colour, framing sea and horizon and the dislimning clouds above, there blazed such a span of prismatic colour as made even the watchers glad; and beyond it, on a mightier arch, with vaster circumference, hung the ghost of another rainbow greater than the first.

Stella speculated as to Peter's feelings and guessed at them pretty accurately.

"He will come after breakfast full of great resolutions, which he will not even mean to keep. He will speak comfortable words and go back to-morrow to uncomfortable deeds," prophesied Achille.

But he was mistaken. Peter did not come. When he returned home gloomily from the plantations on the previous day, Peter Pratt had already made up his mind to a course of action. He meant to take flight, get across to the mainland, and obliterate himself for a time. Then at a later day, he would communicate with his wife, appeal to her sleepless charity and powers of forgiveness, and presently win her back to him. In Venezuela, or Haiti, among the riff-raff and scum of those irresponsible republics, he would be safe enough for a season, and doubtless be able to make a living by his wits, after the fashion of many other worthless men.

But his schemes were changed, and, to his amazement, he found the letter from Monsieur

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Pons, half jest, half stern censure. And there came also the cheque and the cigars.

He stared at the money, hardly able to believe his eyes. He was saved, and with fifty pounds to the good. Yet he thought but slightly of his father-in-law. He belonged to that sort of men who set down all altruism as weakness, and scorn generosity or fine feeling, since these virtues merely puzzle them and have no place in their own theory or practice.

"If he's that sort, a pity I didn't touch him sooner," reflected Peter. "I'll go up and do the sackcloth and ashes to-morrow; but I never thought he'd part to that tune, even for Stella. If the old bird would only peg out, I should handle useful money. Meantime it ought to be easy to play the game and keep him contented. Stella must be rewarded. This is one for her."

He planned vague enterprises calculated to please Stella; but meantime he was free until the next day, with fifty pounds to spend if he desired to do so. He planned such a night as his soul loved, and carried it through to the letter. Returning home at three o'clock, he went to bed with the help of a negro, and proved next day in no condition to ascend to his father-in-law's villa on the mountain.

He slept till noon, then found himself better and equal to a brandy and soda. He would ride up in the evening and bring Stella back. He sent a boy to say that he would do so, and the boy carried a brief letter, which called on God and

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

Monsieur Pons to witness that from this hour until his last Peter would sin no more.

He kept his word, for his final piece of wickedness was accomplished, his last evil thought sped. He had begun one of his own cigars, when he remembered the better brand that awaited him, turned to the parcel from his father-in-law, stripped off the paper, and opened the box. As he put in his hand something like a silver bangle twinkled out and went up his sleeve. With a curse he dragged it down, flung it on the floor, and crushed it under his heel; but he was too late. Fer-de-lance had buried its fangs in his left forearm. Two tiny purple spots showed there. He pressed his lips to them and sucked; then he took a knife and made a deep incision; lastly he rushed out of doors with the blood pouring, and started to run to the doctor, who lived within a quarter of a mile of Villa Caprice. But fer-de-lance works quickly. In a hundred yards he was staggering, and in a hundred and fifty he was down, with his legs dead below the knees. Two negroes saw him and thought he was drunk, but he called and said: "Doctor—snake!" So they picked him up then; but in half-a-minute he was unconscious, and before they laid him on the balcony of the doctor's house and screamed together for aid, Peter had saluted the world.

Elsewhere his wife and her father were at luncheon when his message came; and the boy had hardly departed before a black policeman galloped up with the fatal news.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Marse Pratt—him dead, sar—him plenty dead—stung by poison snake. Him run for doctor, but before doc. get to him, de gem'man gone to glory. An' de snake he dead too—a fer-de-lance!"

"A fer-de-lance!" cried Achille. "Merciful Providence!—can it mean—"

He crumpled up, sank into a chair, and stared at the policeman. Monsieur Pons seemed to be all eyes.

"Speak," he said—"what more do you know? When did it happen?"

"I know nuffin mo' dan dat, sar. I ride up first ting to tell de sad news to Missy Peter."

They were soon hastening to Castries, and, having learned the truth, Monsieur Pons went to the Governor and made a statement of the facts. He was prepared, if the police desired it, to surrender his person.

But he found no man's hand against him. It was only too clear that in some careless moment he had mixed his two parcels, which were of identical size, and sent the old cigar-box with its deadly contents to his son-in-law, and the new box to Professor Frost.

St Lucia, as a whole, held that it was Providence, not Monsieur Pons, who organised this error. Nothing better than the extinction of a very worthless blackguard could have happened, and not a soul mourned the disaster, or even pretended sympathy with the widow.

For Monsieur Pons, indeed, there was considerable commiseration. He had countless friends

M. PONS AND HIS DAUGHTER

and not an enemy. His long record was one of charity and kindness: and those blessed with sufficient imagination could well guess that to cause the death of a fellow-creature in this fashion must be a source of terrible affliction to one of his tender heart and forgiving spirit.

He never discussed it, and even his intimates understood that the death of Peter Pratt was not a subject to be mentioned in his ears. For a time he appeared more melancholy than usual, deserted his familiar haunts, and was seldom seen at the club. He devoted his sole care to Stella, and when she returned to health and spirits, so did he.

But he hid his heart from her, even as he hid it from all others.

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so,” he was fond of quoting from his favourite poet.

“The essence of virtue,” he would often argue, “depends not upon the seen, but the unseen; not on the revealed, but the implicit; not on the act, but the spirit and purpose of the doer.”

He lived long enough to see Stella happily married to a Frenchman, and to dance a grandson and granddaughter on his thin knees.

IX

CARNIVAL

TONNY BLADES, the Third Officer of R.M.S. *Avon*, knew the West Indies by heart, and as we approached each island in turn he sought me out and gave me its history, with a wealth of picturesque detail and a power of vivid description beyond praise.

But I 'read up' Martinique in a guide before we reached that fair island, and when the Third came along, bristling with information as usual, I anticipated him rather maliciously.

"We shall soon be in the roadstead of St Pierre, Blades," I said, "for already one can see a famous, weather-stained, conical stone, with grey sides and a brown head, lifting out of the sea. An interesting splinter from the volcanic past is that rock. Do you know that it was once recognised as an addition to the Royal Navy of Great Britain — actually named and commissioned? Yes, Blades, believe me, H.M.S. *Diamond Rock* is a memorial of the West Indian wars between England and France; and up that impossible-looking pinnacle our plucky ancestors dragged a cannon and fought for their stronghold."

"And here," I continued, while he stared at me reproachfully, "are Trois Islets—a spot deeply

CARNIVAL

interesting as the birthplace of the Empress Josephine. You know all about her, of course? As for Martinique——”

But I had not the heart to go on. The Third Officer was so visibly disappointed. Moreover, it would not have been politic, for I was to be his guest ashore for a night and a day. Tommy Blades had twenty-four hours' leave, and promised that the friends in St Pierre who were going to entertain him would gladly extend their hospitality to me.

Tommy, indeed, possessed two intimate acquaintances on the island: the Bishop of Martinique, and a storekeeper, named Fastnet, who, among other gifts, was reputed to make the best rum punch in the West Indies. Happily, it was with Mr Fastnet we were to put up.

“But we'll go and see the Bishop first,” decided Tommy. “We'll find him at the cathedral probably—he sticks to business like anything—and if he's not there, we shall hear where he may most likely be run down. He hasn't got a palace yet, though he deserves one.”

We went ashore together in the mail boat and had landed before noon.

These were days long gone by, before the awful eruption of the mountains buried St Pierre in fiery scoria and slew half its unfortunate inhabitants; but the island had suffered a minor disaster during the previous year, and many evidences of tornado still marked the little port. For there were wrecks in the roads, since no

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

sailing ship was able to get out before that sudden hurricane and no anchor could hold against the terrific surges of the sea. Ashore evidences of the stroke were also apparent, in a spick-and-span newness produced by acres of fresh corrugated iron roofing. A hundred bright, new houses had sprung up from the ruin of those destroyed. The palms also suffered decimation, and many naked trunks still towered around the town and on the hills ; but their crowns had been torn off and blown miles inland.

Martinique on that February day was an emerald set in a sapphire sea. Her billowy hills towered to the crater of the volcano, that brooded over all, and their tiers and terraces were bright with vegetation. The inevitable cloud cap hung over the mountains and burned like a crown of gold in the noontide sun ; while beneath stretched fertile plains that faded away into the purple heights beyond.

Masses of people were in motion as we walked the main street and all appeared to be streaming in the direction of the cathedral. Tommy, indeed, grew concerned.

"I'm afraid we shall find Bish. is busy," he said. "There's something out of the common doing in his line apparently. Is it a Saint's Day, or a Fast Day, or anything special of that sort?"

I suggested the possibility of a wedding.

"Perhaps he's marrying Fastnet," I hinted ; but this did not amuse the Third.

"Fastnet's been married for years," he said ;

CARNIVAL

and then he stopped a negro and asked what was about to happen.

"De funeral—de funeral, Massa!" answered Quashie, and hastened on. Crowds pushed steadily forward, and now there tolled a melancholy, deep-mouthed bell.

"Evidently some big bug is dead," declared Blades. "People wouldn't come from the ends of the island like this for anybody less than the Governor."

"In that case," I suggested, "we'd better leave the Bishop till later and go to your other chum first."

A look of fear came into the Third's eyes.

"Good Lord!" he said, "suppose he is burying Fastnet."

"Would the whole island turn out for Fastnet if he was?" I asked.

"Certainly it would. Jacob Fastnet is one of the leading storekeepers in Martinique and a great pal of all the French notabilities."

"Be hopeful. It's most improbable that he, of all men, should have fallen. Trust your luck."

"I'm not lucky," confessed Blades. "If I were, I should be a First Officer at this moment. Still, as you say—ah! There *is* Fastnet!"

He rushed forward and greeted a little, middle-aged man with a genial, wrinkled face and blue eyes behind a pair of spectacles. He was evidently in the best of health, and showed pleasure at the sight of Tommy. Me, also, he welcomed with that cordial hospitality which one seldom misses in the Lesser Antilles.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"I was going to the funeral, but I don't think I shall now," he said.

"Don't go," advised the Third. "Too melancholy this weather. Who is it—the Governor?"

"The Governor!" No—Charlotte McCloud—poor little maid."

"All this splutter for a girl?"

"You haven't heard, of course. She was brutally murdered a week ago. We're wanting the accursed wretch who did it pretty bad, I can tell you; but he's given us the slip so far. You shall hear the story later. Now come along and have a cocktail before luncheon. What's the best news?"

Jacob Fastnet was a busy man, for he owned the largest general store in St Pierre; but, after the usual, hearty, West Indian way, he devoted himself to us, as though there were nothing better to do, gave us the best possible luncheon, drove us to see the sights, and in the evening entertained us with a typical meal of the country. Tree oysters began it, I remember, and they were followed by gourd soup, snapper fish, boiled yams and plantains, Muscovy ducks, coco-nut pudding, pines, grenadillos, and Fastnet's sublime punch with the coffee.

Over green 'Sobre-mesa' cigars, in a garden sweet with stephanotis, musical to the chime of a fountain, bright with the flashing of fireflies, we heard the story of the murder.

"There's a good deal out of the common in it," declared Fastnet. "A nigger love story no

CARNIVAL

doubt, roughly speaking, but more than that too. Charlotte McCloud was the doctor's sister, and a better man than Ned McCloud don't breathe in Martinique, or anywhere. The McClouds are octoroons, and while Ned is a brown man, with his white blood appearing in his European features, his sister was what we call a white negress—fairer than many Europeans, with blue eyes and curly, golden-bright hair; but her features were of Ethiopian cast. She had the full lips and flattened nose of her grandmother. Nature harks back like this in mixed breeding and plays queer pranks. You'll get all sorts of combinations of colour and form; but real white negroes are rare. Personally I didn't admire Charlotte's face—there is something uncanny about such freaks; but most people, and all with black blood in them, thought her the loveliest thing on earth. She was, in fact, considered a very great beauty; and a beauty she was as far as her nature and her soul were concerned. A heart of gold. In fact, she was worthy of her brother, and greater praise I can't give her.

"They hadn't an enemy between them; for Ned does nothing but good, and works three mornings a week for charity among the poor, while little Charlotte followed his example in her own way and played the angel and brought happiness to the humblest cabin. A real, good, high-minded, modest girl, eighteen and heart-whole, so Ned declared. But I have my doubts. There's a chap on R.M.S. *Dart* who used to be

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

jolly welcome when he called here—a young Scot called Geddie."

"He's got promotion and gone on the Plate route," said the Third Officer.

"He'll be a sad man when he hears about it, I fancy. And this brings me to Dan Robson, son of old Matthew Robson, our chemist. Rather a jovial soul—so his friends thought; but a very uncommon nigger, for, as things turned out, he revealed a power of feeling and doing rare in his people. He has character, though one didn't guess its devilish possibilities. A Latin or Celtic sort of beggar in his mental make-up, yet his father swears that all his race is pure-bred negro. He was a good-for-nothing waster from his youth, and lived on the old man and never did any work for years; but at last he got employment as a clerk at St Kitts, and disappeared from Martinique for some time. Then he came back and said he was going to Barbados to learn his father's business and succeed him. But he never went. Instead he started a raffish life in St Pierre, and then had the infernal impudence to fall in love with Charlotte McCloud. She often came to the chemist's store for her brother, and was good friends with high and low alike; so Dan fell in love with her and for the first time in his life, I imagine, felt a decent emotion.

"She reformed the rip unconsciously, for I suppose his wits told him he must turn over a new leaf if he desired even to get on speaking terms. But he was clever, or at any rate mighty

CARNIVAL

cunning, and sought out Dr McCloud and pitched a great yarn that he meant to begin a new life and study medicine and try to make himself a respectable and useful member of society.

"Ned liked him, for he had a certain charm, and thought he really meant to do man's work ; and little Charlotte, there's no doubt, encouraged him — not to make love to her ; but in his ambitions to work and get on and justify his existence.

"Ned gave some thought to Robson and advised the nigger to master pharmacy first and then, if he still felt like greater things, go to America and study and get a degree, if his father could afford to let him. McCloud promised help too, for he always liked the black people to get up in the world. The McClouds, in fact, felt nothing but kindly to Robson, and didn't guess for a moment what was in the brute's mind ; but he was going mad for Charlotte all the time and presently proposed to her. She declined him, of course, and was a good deal scared by his deadly earnestness and frantic protestations. But Ned felt exceedingly angry, for you could call such a proposal nothing but insolence on Dan's part. Personally I wasn't so much surprised as they were, for I knew the young man's boundless self-confidence and cast-iron nerve.

"Then young Robson became a menace and a pest ; and if poor Ned had only taken my advice and had the beggar locked up, when he threatened all sorts of things, Charlotte might be alive now.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

But he understands the negro character as well as any man living, and he felt positive that lovesick Dan only talked and raved out of his disappointment, that he would calm down, and that he was incapable of a capital crime. Nor was Charlotte afraid of him—even when he met her, after being forbidden her brother's house, and swore to her before God that he would kill her if she refused to marry him. Ned merely followed conventional lines of thought and imagined that Robson was true to type, instead of being the callous and desperate criminal he has proved.

"Neither of the McClouds had ever been in love, you see, or perhaps they might have felt the danger of the passion in the case of this undisciplined blackguard. But not knowing what it meant, they saw no real danger and argued that Dan would soon get over his reverse. They ignored his threats, and took no steps to guard against him in any sort of way. His father believed them right; but Dan's uncle—a shrewder man—always declared him dangerous, and told Ned as much more than once.

"Weeks passed; Dan Robson apparently subsided, and the doctor was actually in my stores, arguing with me that he had been right about the negro character, when he heard the awful news. A nigger servant came babbling in, with his eyes rolling out of his head, to say that McCloud was wanted at home and that his sister was suddenly taken very ill indeed. The poor devil had the wit to put it like that, and Ned raced

CARNIVAL

up to the villa, to find Charlotte beyond reach for ever. The girl lay on a stone seat at the bottom of the garden with her throat cut.

"How long she had been dead before the old gardener found her, none knew ; but the murderer had got a fair start for the hills ; and though every mounted and armed man in St Pierre was out scouring the country after him in one hour, from that moment we've had no sign of him. Not a shadow of a clue has turned up.

"His unfortunate father knew nothing, nor did his uncle—a man in humble life, who works at the pier-head most of his time. So there it stands, and for my part I agree with the majority, that Dan Robson is dead and has made an end of himself in such a way that he will never be found again; but a good many are of a contrary opinion —Ned himself among the number. He believes the wretch is alive, hidden in the hills.

"Such a man, the deed once done and his demoniac possession ended, will come back to reason and feel a burning desire to live'—so Ned told me. 'He's strong, cunning and clever, with a great zest of life. He's been mad, and now he'll grow sane, pit his wits against the world he has outraged, and escape his fate if he can.' But I am not of this opinion. There's a touch of his negro forefathers' simplicity in Ned McCloud himself, you see. Of course his theory may be correct ; but for my part, with that blood on his hands and the innocent girl a corpse at his feet, I see the blackguard a prey to furies of despair and terror.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

He has brain enough to feel remorse and in vain he flies from his tormentors. In the darkness of the next night, if not sooner, he probably destroyed himself, or flung himself into the sea for the sharks to do so. I hope McCloud's right all the same, for it would be a great satisfaction to know the man was caught and hanged and put out of the world for ever."

So spoke Jacob Fastnet, and we were silent for some time after his gloomy narrative. Then our entertainer sought a pleasanter theme and congratulated us on some good fortune.

" You men are in luck, for you've just arrived to get a unique experience. To-morrow's the first day of Carnival, and if you want to see something beyond your wildest dreams, or nightmares, you shall. A West Indian Carnival is like no other Saturnalia on earth. It beggars description and defies language. The entire black population to-morrow, with few exceptions, will be making a fool of itself—an opportunity no nigger ever neglects."

He did not exaggerate, and from the flat roof of his store on the following afternoon we beheld an amazing spectacle.

The main street, by no means broad, was lined with shops and places of business, before which stood and sat a scattered row of sightseers on chairs and forms. But they were few compared with the performers. The stone-paved street itself was crammed with a brilliant pandemonium—a whirling, winding, laughing, screaming and dancing mass of men, women, children, effigies

CARNIVAL

and dummies, all in rainbow-coloured attire. The sun blazed, the air trembled, the white dust flew ; the atmosphere reeked with hot odours, sweet and sour, and throbbed with drum and trumpet music. Sense fainted before such a welter of riotous humanity.

And yet one hardly saw a human face or hand. Wings, tails, horns, masks, feathers, finery, stilts, gigantic umbrellas, hobby-horses and monstrous costumes concealed the crowd of human beings. Through sunshine and velvety shadow they streamed—youth and age, beast and man, entangled, convulsed, kaleidoscopically mingled. Every roaring, rollicking company was a study in fantastic attire and wildest behaviour. They were like children just out of school, bursting with pent-up energies. There was no rhyme or reason in their proceedings, no method in their madness, no harmony in their songs and dances, no music in their ululations. Groups, arm in arm, rioted together and clashed with other groups ; while solitary masqueraders played the fool all alone, each before an audience of shrieking admirers.

One man, in pink trousers with a black seat, and a blue shirt having huge white stars upon it, kept taking off his billy-cock hat to the goats, dogs and fowls that occurred by the way. He had a red mask, hideously painted, with a huge nose and green eyes.

“ That’s Mick Sullivan,” said Fastnet. “ He’s deaf and dumb, and he’s played this joke every year for ten years and more. One of our proudest

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

survivals. In fact, a carnival wouldn't be a carnival without Mick. Then that lunatic over there, with the horns and hoofs, clothed in red hair and beads, is pretending to be an Obi man—not the real thing—but that's how some of 'em dress on grand occasions—like a dancing bear more than a human being. He's Tom Watson in everyday life—a servant of mine. You couldn't want a better boy. He won't be any use, however, till Carnival's over. The only responsible people now are the coolies. They look down on the niggers as a lower order of creation; they don't take these periodic farewells to the flesh themselves and don't pretend to understand the game."

Martinique negresses are famed all the world over for their gorgeous attire: a combination of French taste and their own love of colour. Their everyday garments are sufficiently brilliant; but to-day their reds and purples, greens and blues, yellows and scarlets, relieved with flashing trinkets and snow-white, starched, cotton petticoats, beggared description. Their camouflage vied with the butterflies and humming-birds. Their turbans gleamed; their ample figures actually blazed. They wore pink silk stockings, short frocks, wonderful button boots and wire gauze masks. These were all moulded in one pattern of horrible inanity, with red, rose-bud mouths, delicate, pencilled eyebrows and blue, staring eyes. The beholder was expected to believe each masquer a white woman; and, that the deception might be complete, every negress

CARNIVAL

covered up her ebony skin, wore white gloves, and concealed her head and ears and neck. But even thus disguised, their free masculine stride and the whining, giggling, screaming Ethiopian voices bursting from their dreadful masks proclaimed them.

Many of the male mummers trusted for success to originality of invention.

"The Prince of Darkness is not always a gentleman, you see," said Fastnet. "Our niggers best like that sulphurous character at times of rejoicing. But I'm afraid the Martinique conception of a bad angel is rather cheap."

He spoke truly, for a more out-at-elbows, patched, darned, ragged-bottomed and seedy collection of demons was never seen. Their yells suggested the place of torment vividly enough, however, and they bawled horribly while they prodded people with their toasting-forks and hit the children with their tails. As for the little folks themselves, many were the sons and daughters of the Creole shopkeepers, who formed the bulk of the audience. They were dressed as soldiers, with fierce black eyebrows, moustaches and imperials painted on their baby faces ; and their antics were hailed with special delight by the adult performers.

Tommy and I had been watching this delirious spectacle for half-an-hour, and laughing ourselves weary, when a man joined our little company and shook hands with Fastnet. He was a slightly built, rather tall fellow, with a brown face and gentle, sad eyes. His features were regular and

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

refined, and his hair black but not curly. He wore black, and seemed out of tune with the day.

Jacob Fastnet was obviously much astonished to see his visitor. Indeed, he made no attempt to conceal his surprise.

"My dear boy," he said, "this is an unexpected pleasure; but I'm right glad you could come—right glad. Can I do anything in the world for you?"

"No, old man. I just called for companionship. I'm at a loose end and can't bear the empty house. I thought you'd be alone. I have an idea running in my head."

Our host introduced us.

"Two friends from the ship taking a look at our Carnival," he said.

The stranger was Dr McCloud.

We greeted him with due gravity, and Tommy Blades, who had met him once, a year before, ventured to express his deep sorrow and sympathy at recent tragic events.

"But you don't want to speak about that," he concluded.

"It is impossible not to speak about it, gentlemen," said the doctor quietly. "My mind is empty of everything but my dreadful loss, and I find it better to talk about it to friends than think of it alone."

An extraordinary apparition danced past us below. He was a negro, bare as to legs and feet, clad apparently in nothing but an old sack, from which protruded his head and limbs. For a mask he wore a large coco-nut shell, hideously painted,

CARNIVAL

and he carried a long sugar-cane, to the top of which was tied a tiny scarlet parasol.

"That's Jacob Ward," said Fastnet. "He's weak in his head on ordinary occasions. He'll probably end the day in a fit. He's keeping cool, however."

The negro, with numerous admirers at his heels, saluted a bevy of girls and strove to embrace them. They shrieked with laughter and fled before him.

"It's strange to think that fiend is here among these innocent creatures," said McCloud quietly, his dark eyes wandering over the throng beneath us.

"You don't mean Daniel Robson?"

"Most certainly I do. I'm as sure as I am sure of anything that he's hidden among them. It's just a thing he would do—and do with safety too. I've warned the police to keep a look-out round his father's house. Can't you see his opportunity? To-day he's as safe in this crowd as any other disguised man. He'll be concealed in some outlandish costume, and the police are stopping the unknown people from the villages and making them reveal themselves in hope to surprise the wretch. We may, in fact, catch him to-day. If we don't, we never shall. Everything, in my opinion, depends upon the next hour or two."

Our interest in the doctor increased, but Fastnet urged him not to hope.

"Don't rely upon it, old son," he begged. "I'll

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

lay you a hundred to one the brute is in hell, where he belongs, not here. It's an old story, and the love-mad nigger has killed himself again and again after—after what Robson did. We may find him yet, but it won't be alive."

"I, on the contrary, am positive that he lives, Jacob," answered the other. "I believe it possible —nay, probable—that my eyes have rested upon him within this hour. But I hope nothing. You need not warn me against being too sanguine, be sure."

"Are there many ways by which he might come into St Pierre?" I asked.

"A dozen," answered Fastnet. "A hundred, you may say, for he'd very likely steal down from the woods into the plantations, and pop out of the sugar-cane into the road when he saw it empty."

"Why should he?" asked McCloud. "The roads will be full of masqueraders, and, as I tell you, he will feel himself as safe as any other man when once disguised."

But then an unusual commotion took place below—a movement foreign to the spirit of the hour. Some rumour had run invisible among the masqueraders. Laughter ceased, the moving mass stagnated, and many turned and ran together up the street. There the road grew thronged to suffocation.

"Something's up," said Fastnet, and we craned our necks to see what it might be.

Through the mass at last a small party of negro police pushed their way. They were

CARNIVAL

excited and chattering to the throng around them.

"My God! I believe they've got him!" cried McCloud.

He hastened down and we followed. A number of Creoles had crowded round the officers, but they made way for the doctor.

We heard the story in patches, and for my part I could not gather enough to build a coherent tale; but Fastnet followed the tangled narrative quickly enough and became much excited. He spoke to the police and McCloud.

"Don't waste a moment—everybody knows that dress—hunt high and low—go to his father's house and his uncle's. Surround 'em. A red mask and pink pants and a blue shirt with large white stars on it. Tell everybody to look for Mick Sullivan. He went down the street not an hour ago. We all saw him."

Dr McCloud and the police hurried away, while Fastnet bade us run about and lend a hand.

"What the dickens is the matter?" asked Blades. "This is all Greek to us. Somebody's killed, apparently—that's all I understand."

Then his friend explained.

"My dear chap, a horrible thing has happened, and Ned's right and I'm wrong. That wretch—the man who killed Charlotte McCloud—he's been here under our noses! He's in St Pierre now—must be. You saw that deaf and dumb nigger I pointed out taking off his hat to the dogs and goats? Well, of course, everybody thought it was

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

Mick Sullivan, who's played these pranks for years. But Mick's been murdered—out on the edge of La Gloria estate, three miles from here. The beggar's done in Mick and put on his clothes—see? He knew all about poor Mick and did the same things; and he's safer even than McCloud thought, because Mick was deaf and dumb. It's a rare bit of devilry, but luckily a dog found Sullivan. Some chaps coming down from La Gloria saw the dog go into the cane and give tongue and followed it. So the thing has been found while it was red-hot. And the devil only can save Robson now."

It seemed that the devil had saved Robson. We joined the hunt, for the news had run through the heart of the Carnival and half the people were seeking the pink pants and white stars, while many frightened women were flying to their homes. There rose false alarms innumerable, and one or two unfortunate men, who remotely resembled the runaway in their mumming dresses, were roughly handled and revealed.

Presently we met Fastnet again. Neither at his father's nor his uncle's home could any news be learned of Daniel Robson.

The latter dwelling—a little house near the wharf—was locked up and apparently empty; but the police had forced the door and made unavailing search.

The hunt began to wane and we were reminded sharply of the flight of time, for suddenly, without warning of twilight, the tropical night was upon

CARNIVAL

us, and soon afterwards the bellow of a gun from the steamer warned those of her passengers ashore to return at once. Tommy Blades had already gone back to his duty and now, taking leave of Fastnet, I begged to be informed by telegram at St Thomas of the sequel to this adventure.

He promised to oblige me.

"The brute can hardly get out of St Pierre now," he said. "We've run a cordon round it."

Having expressed my obligations, we parted, and, with other belated travellers, I returned to the *Avon* as she was getting her anchor. Already it was night and fire flashed from the oars of our boat as four niggers tugged at them. Another boat followed us. St Pierre receded to a twinkling line of coloured lights, and a rocket or two from the evening Carnival began to cut the velvety air and fling gaudy red and green stars to the silver constellations above them.

"What an astounding display of eighteen-carat idiocy," said a man who sat beside me in the boat. "But I believe we've missed the best of it. The pace quickens after nightfall."

They were waiting at the gangway to pull up the ladder, and we tumbled aboard as the steamer began to move. An electric lamp flung its sheaf of brightness upon the steps and a dozen men, already dressed for dinner, stood above to see our arrival. Tommy was in command at the gangway, and he had just asked me for the last news from shore when there came a scream from the sea and a despairing voice arrested him.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Wait—wait, gem'man ! Stop de boat for Missy Masters ! Missy Masters coming aboard for San Thomas. Stop de boat, sar ! Oh, me Gard ! I lef behind !"

It was a common scene attending departure. Astern a negro pulled for dear life and in the bows of his skiff stood a woman, with a bundle, waving an umbrella. We carried plenty of deck passengers forward, from island to island, and they seemed to take a delight in running it fine. The Third swore and hesitated ; but I begged for the frantic female and he lowered the ladder again. The steamer had begun to move and it was a matter of seconds ; but the negress just reached the ladder and hoisted herself on to it with one arm, holding her bundle under the other. The little boat rocked and nearly capsized as she jumped. The man in it screamed and lost a paddle. Then his boat was left, a black spot in our sparkling wake, and the traveller, panting and whining, scrambled on deck.

"All dat dam nigger's fault," she said. "He no pull—he drink. I Missy Masters. I gwine to San Thomas. To hell wid de dog of a boatman—all him fault !"

She panted past me to go forward—an ample woman with an immense bosom. Her clothes were of spotless white and she wore yellow gloves and carried her bundle and a big green umbrella. As she passed me and vanished out of the radius of the light aloft I was conscious of one little pink flash. It came from her bundle, which was black ;

CARNIVAL

but the colour stuck in my head, for had not all Martinique been hunting it ashore? To connect Missy Masters with the murder of poor Mick Sullivan seemed so vain that I dismissed the thought; yet curiously it returned and reminded me upon what trivial accidents great matters and great rascals may often hang.

After dinner I told Blades; but he attached no importance to the incident.

"I'm seeing everything pink too," he said. "It's a rum fact that a colour will stick in your eye sometimes and make you colour-blind to every other—just as an idea will sometimes get into your head and make you mind-blind to any other idea."

"All the same," I said, "there would be no harm done in satisfying yourself that the woman's all right."

"It's the purser's pigeon," answered Tommy. "The deck passengers are at supper now and he might get a chance to look into her bundle, if you remember which it was."

Forward the huddled luggage of the coloured travellers littered the deck, and under an electric light I had no difficulty in finding the black bundle among many others like it, for the green umbrella of Missy Masters was propped against her other property. No flash of pink broke its rotundity now; but the purser showed not the least compunction in satisfying me. He untied the bundle and revealed a pair of pink trousers with a black seat, a blue shirt with large white stars and the

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

mask that accompanied the costume. A complete male outfit of ordinary garments was also found.

In two minutes the captain heard the story and directed that the owner of the bundle should be arrested. But it was done very quietly, and when, half-an-hour later, Missy Masters sat smoking her pipe with her coloured friends, a seaman came along and told her that the purser wanted her for her passage money.

She fell into the trap, went aft and walked into the arms of the boatswain. But she made a terrific fight, and it took four white men and Tommy himself to get the handcuffs on. The battle, of course, revealed the truth, for while she struggled furiously, with the evident intention of jumping overboard, the majestic bosom of Missy Masters collapsed, her turban flew off and it was clear the forces of law and order had to do with a man.

We carried the mails and could not go back ; but before dawn we made Dominica, and, at Roseau, Daniel Robson went ashore—to be returned to his native island at the earliest opportunity.

“A good actor thrown away,” said the Third. “A touch of genius, in fact. Upon my soul, if it had only been for killing another nigger I could have forgiven the devil ; but not, of course, for killing that unfortunate girl.”

We argued this, however, for the captain held that a murder by one insane with love is not so infamous in degree as the slaughter of a deaf and dumb man.

CARNIVAL

Then Blades reviewed the case in his most luminous language, and showed how Fate, that she might fool Robson to the top of his bent, had sent Sullivan like a lamb to the slaughter.

"There was his chance," said the Third, "to get unknown into the town concealed behind a notorious disguise, and safe as houses, because the victim could neither speak nor hear. As a matter of fact, everything went dead right with him, and nothing but an inch of pink cotton, which you happened to see for an instant, bitched the show. A murderer always does something silly. If he'd left the dress behind he'd have escaped. But he had not the slightest fear in any case, because, as he has confided to me, he didn't know, till we broke it to him, that Sullivan had been found. He knocked the man out, and dragged him into the cane and finished him there. Then he put on his Carnival clothes and danced down the street, a wolf in sheep's clothing, copying Sullivan's familiar antics. And then he went to his uncle by the wharves, knowing he'd serve him if it could be done. There he put on some of his aunt's clothes—she was at the Carnival—and prepared to come to St Thomas with us. They left the house for safety, waited till dark and cut it fine—finer than they meant. But the point is that neither he nor his uncle, who rowed him out, had heard the murder was discovered. He's a resourceful villain. I daresay he'll give them the slip yet before they get him back to Martinique ; and I shan't worry if he does."

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

But Tommy's suspicions proved groundless. A month or more afterwards we were returning from St Thomas to Barbados, and in the morning watch I went on to the bridge to see the sunrise. The Third happened to be on duty, and, in its glory of rose and gold, an island was lifted ahead out of the blue.

"Which is it now?" I asked. "I lose count of them."

"You ought to know this one," he answered. "You'd be a great hero no doubt if you went ashore at this place. It's Martinique."

We presently swept to our moorings and fired our gun.

The Third had his glasses on the shore, and as he looked church bells from St Pierre struck the hour. Suddenly he started and handed the glasses to me.

"Damned queer coincidence," he said. "To think, after all this time, we come back at the psychological moment. Look abaft that clump of coco-nut palms, beyond the white houses."

Against the glory of the morning, conspicuous against the radiant earth and rolling green, a big black flag fluttered from a solitary flagstaff.

"In at the death," said Tommy. "That's your work."

But I don't think the Third ever quite forgave me. He always felt that Robson had deserved to get off, and that I was the tool of an unsportsmanlike Providence.

X

THE MONKEY

i

THEY sat together forward, under scant shadows, while the *Land Crab*, a little coasting schooner, lay nearly becalmed in the Caribbean. Her sails flapped idly; hot air danced over the deck and along the bulwarks. Now and then a spar creaked lazily, or a block went "chip, chip," as the *Land Crab* rolled on a swell. The sun blazed over the foreyard-arm, the heat was tremendous, but Pete and Pete basked in it and loved it. Neither saw necessity for a straw of head covering; indeed Pete the greater wore no clothes at all. He sat watching Pete the less; anon he put forth a small black hand for a banana; then, with forehead puckered into a world of wrinkles and furrows, he inspected his namesake's work; and later, tired of squatting in the sun, hopped on to the bulwark and up the mizzen shrouds.

Peter the greater was a brown monkey, treasured property of the skipper; and Pete the less, now cleaning some flying-fish for the cook, was a negro boy, treasured property of nobody—a small lad, with a lean body, more of which appeared than was hidden by the rags of his shirt, and great

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

black eyes like a dog's. He was, in fact, a very dog-like boy. When the men cursed him he cowered, and hung his head, and slunk away, sometimes showing a canine tooth; when they were in merry mood he frisked and fawned and went mad with delight. But chance for joy seldom offered. He had a stern master, and an awful responsibility in the shape of Pete the greater. This active beast, under God and the skipper, was Pete's boss. The sailors said that he always touched his wool to it, and everybody knew that he talked to it for hours at a time. When the lad first came aboard, Captain Spicer put the matter in a nutshell.

"See here, nig—this monkey's your pigeon; you've just got to watch it, an' feed it, an' think of it all the time. And bear in mind as he's a darned sight more valuable than anything else aboard this ship. So keep your weather eye lifting, and remember there'll be hell round here if harm comes to Pete."

"I's call Pete too, Cap'n sar," the boy had answered, grinning at what had struck him as a grand joke.

"Are you? Well, you get pals with Pete number one. That's what you've got to do."

But apes are capricious, and Pete the less found his pigeon aboard the *Land Crab* no bed of roses. For that matter the rest of the hands suffered too. Nathan Spicer was a bald-headed old man with an evil temper—one blighted by sorrow and affliction, hard to please, bad to sail with. Dick Bent,

THE MONKEY

the mate, had known his captain in past years, when the sun shone on him, and he explained the position from his former knowledge.

"It's like this 'ere—Nature filled the old sweep with the milk of human kindness ; then she up and sent a thunderstorm of troubles and turned it sour. I've sailed on and off with him these twenty year, and I mind when he kept his foot on his temper, an' were a very tidy member o' seafarin' society. But after his missis died and his kid died, then he—what had married old and was wrapped up in the woman—why, then he cast off all holds, and chucked religion, and wished he could see the world in hell, and done his little best to help send it there. Men gets that way when things turn contraiwise. Not but what there's good hid in him too."

But Bent's shipmates—three mongrel negroes and two Englishmen—failed to find the buried treasure. Skipper Spicer was always the same, with painful monotony. Only the man, Dick Bent, and the monkey, Pete, could pull with him. The rest of the crew suffered variously, for the captain, though no longer young, was rough and powerful. He had outbursts of passion that presented a sorry sight for gods and men. Such paroxysms seemed likely enough to end life for him some day ; and just as likely to end life for another.

The negro boy scraped out his flying-fish and cut off their tails and wings, then he peeled a pannikin of sweet potatoes and talked to his charge.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Marse Pete," he said gravely, "you's a dam lucky gem'man, sar—de mose lucky gem'man aboard de *Lan' Crab*. You frens wid cap'n a'ways. He nebber sharp wid you—nebber; but he dat sharp wid me, sar, dat I'se sore all over de back-side all de time. I fink you might say word to cap'n for me, Marse Pete, for I'se mighty kind nigger to you, sar."

The monkey was chewing another banana. It stripped off the skin with quick black fingers, filled its mouth, stuffed its cheeks, and then munched and munched and looked at Pete. It held its head on one side as though thinking and weighing each word, and Pete felt quite convinced that it understood him. The boy himself was ten years old. He had entered the world undesired and knew little of it, save that sugar-cane was sweet in the mouth but hard to come by, honestly or otherwise. Pete the greater lived in his master's cabin, and Pete the less often heard the skipper talking to him. If the captain could exchange ideas with his monkey, surely a nigger might do so; and it comforted the boy to chatter his miseries and empty his heart to the beast. Nobody on board had time or inclination to attend to him.

"I wish you was me and me was you, sar, for I has berry bad time aboard dis boat, but you has all b'nana an' no work—an'—an'—don't be so spry, Marse Pete!" as the monkey went capering aloft. "One day you run 'long dem spars too often and fall in de sea to Marse Shark. Den what de boss do wid me?"

THE MONKEY

It happened that Bent was lying full sprawl behind a hatchway, smoking and grinning, as he listened to these remarks. Now he lifted a funny, small head, with a red beard, and answered the question.

"Old man'd skin you, nig, and then throw you after the monkey," he answered.

"I guess he would, sar."

"So keep alive. Why, you might as well steal skipper's watch as let that animal there getadrift."

The skipper came on deck and both Petes saw him at the same moment. One touched his wool and ambled forward to the galley ; the other came down the ratlines head first, and leapt chattering to the captain's shoulder, a favourite perch. His master had owned the monkey five years. It belonged once to his mulattress wife ; and when she was dying, she specially mentioned it and made it over to him. That and his watch were the only treasures he had in the world. With his brown wife and his home in Tobago, the man had been happy, even God-fearing, but the first baby killed its mother and, dying also, left a wrecked life behind. Nathan Spicer cared for nothing now, and consequently feared nothing. It is their interest on earth, not the stake in eternity, that makes men cowards.

ii

The *Land Crab*, delayed by light winds, was some days overdue at Trinidad, and the skipper exploded in successive volcanoes from dawn till

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

dusk. He was always in a rage, and, as Bent observed :

"If this sight o' energy, and cussing and swearing and to helling the ship's comp'ny, was only shoved into the elements, we'd 'a' had half-a-gale o' wind by now. The old man'll bust 'is biler, sure as death, 'fore he's done with it."

But the winds kept baffling, and swearing did not mend them, nor yet blows, nor yet football with Pete the boy. There is no reason to suppose that Skipper Spicer disliked Pete overmuch—not more than he hated any boy; but he was brutal, and needed something to kick at times. Moreover, a kick does not show on a negro, and many imagine that it is the only way of explaining that you disagree with him.

Once the mate ventured to intercede by virtue of his long acquaintance.

"We're old pals, Cap'n," he said, "and meanin' no disrespect, it's like this 'ere—you're killing that little black devil. 'E's small, and you do welt that 'ard. It's 'cause he's a good boy I mention it. If he was a bad 'un, then I'd say, 'lather on,' and I'd help. But he minds his pigeon."

"Which you'd better do likewise," answered the skipper.

"All right, boss. Only it's generally allowed now that nigs is human, same as us, and has workin' souls also."

"Drivel and rot! I don't have none of that twaddle aboard this ship. I know—nobody better'n me—'cause I was a psalm-singer myself

THE MONKEY

among the best. And what's come of it? There ain't no God in these latitoods anyway, else why did he play it so dirty on me? If there's any manner of God at all, He killed my wife and my child for fun, and I don't take no stock in a God that could do that. I'll rip forrad my own way now, till He calls for my checks, which He's quite welcome to, any time—damn Him. But 'tis all bunkum and mumbo-jumbo. Nobody's got a soul no mor'n my monkey, so there's a end of the argument."

"Soul or none, 'e's a deal of sense for sartin," admitted the mate, "a 'mazing deal of sense. An' he takes kind to t'other Pete. If 'e could talk now, I bet he'd say to give the boy a chance, off and on, to get a whole skin over his bones for a change."

"Which if he did," answered the other, "I should say to him same as I do to you: to mind his own blasted bus'ness."

But the men were friends in half-an-hour, for a fair wind came up out of the sea at dusk, the *Land Crab* plodded along and Spicer quickly thawed.

"Darn the old tub, she makes some of them new-fangled boats look silly yet!" he said to Bent, as, a day later, they lumbered through the Dragon's Teeth to Port of Spain.

After leaving Trinidad, the little coaster proceeded to Tobago for a cargo of coco-nuts, and the crew viewed that circumstance with gratification, for the most heavy-witted amongst

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

them never failed to notice how a visit to his former home softened the old man. On this occasion, as upon past trips, the palm-crowned mountains of Tobago brought a measure of peace into the skipper's heart, whilst a fair wind and a good cargo tended to improve that condition. All hands reaped benefit and to Dick Bent the captain grew more communicative than usual.

They walked the deck together one morning on the homeward passage to Barbados, and Spicer lifted a corner of the curtain hiding his past.

"Then it was good to live like, but when my missus went 'west,' and took the baby along with her, life changed. Now there's only two things in all creation I care a red cent about. One's a beast, t'other an old gold watch—pretty mean goods to set your heart on, but all as I've got in the whole world."

"It's a mighty fine watch," said Bent.

"It is, and chain too, for that matter. I was lookin' at 'em in my cabin only half-an-hour past." He brightened as he thought of the trinket, and continued: "I doubt there's many better'n me would fancy that chain across their bellies, but she——"

"Lord deliver us, look aft!" sang out the mate suddenly, interrupting and pointing to the hatch of the companion.

Spicer's monkey had just hopped up on deck, and from his black paw hung the skipper's watch and chain. Pete the greater ambled along towards the bulwark, and a sweat burst from his master's

THE MONKEY

face as he called to the brute in a strange voice. But Pete was perverse. He reached the bulwark and the skipper's nerve died in him, while Bent dared not to take a step towards hastening the threatened catastrophe, or identifying himself therewith. It was a trying moment as the monkey made for his favourite perch on the mizzen rigging, and while he careered forward on all fours, the watch bumped, bumped against the ship's side. The sound brought the blood with a rush to Skipper Spicer's head. Patience was no virtue of his at the best, and he jumped forward with a curse. The man had his hand within six inches of the watch when Pete squeaked and dropped it into the sea. There was a splash, a gleam of gold, and the treasure sank, flashing and twinkling down through the blue, dwindling to a bright, submerged snake, then vanishing for ever. A great gust of passion shook the skipper and tied his tongue. He tried to swear, but could only hiss and growl like an angry beast. Then he seized the monkey by the scruff of the neck as it jumped for his shoulder, shook it and flung it overboard with a shower of oaths. A red light blinded him, he felt his temples bursting, and he reeled away below, not stopping to see a brown head rise from the foam of the splash where Pete had fallen. The monkey fought for it, as one may see a rat driven off shipboard into the deep water. Two terrified eyes gazed upwards at his home, while the *Land Crab* swept by him ; his red mouth opened with a yell, and his black paws

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

began beating the water hard as he fell astern. Presently Pete sank for the first time. Then he came up again and went on fighting.

But the skipper saw nothing. He only felt the hot blood surging through his head as he flung himself on his bunk, face downwards. For a moment he thought death had gripped him ; but the threatened evil passed, and his consciousness did not depart. He guessed that he had been near apoplexy. Then thoughts came and flooded his brain with abomination of desolation. He lay with his bald head on his arms, and turned his mind back into the past. He remembered so much, and every shaft of memory brought him back with a round turn to the present. There was the lemon-tree with Pete's perch on it. His wife had loved the monkey. He could see her now kissing its nose. And she had died with the gold watch ticking under her head. Her wedding ring was upon the chain of it. She had tried to put it on his little finger before she went, but it would not get over the second joint, so she had slipped it upon the watch-chain. Now God in heaven could tell what loathsome fish was nosing it under the sea. And her monkey, her last gift to him, a live meal for a shark. Now the wide world remained to him, empty—save for the thought of what he had done.

He lay heedless of time for near three hours. Then he sat up and looked round the cabin. As he did so the door opened, Bent's small head peeped in and the mate spoke :

THE MONKEY

"Fit as a fiddle, boss; only a flea or two missing."

Then the man shut the cabin door again. But he left something behind. Pete the greater chattered and jumped to his perch in the corner, and from there on to his master's berth. He was dry, warm and much as usual apparently; and he bore no malice whatever. Spicer glared and his breath caught in his throat. Then he grabbed the brute to him till it squeaked, while Nathan snuffled horrible but grateful oaths.

There was only one soul aboard the *Land Crab* who would have gone into a shark-haunted sea to save a monkey, and he did not think twice about it. He came on deck too late to see the catastrophe, though in time to note Pete the greater in the jaws of death. Had he known how the monkey came into the Caribbean he might have doubted the propriety of attempting a rescue; but he did not know, and so he joined it, feeling they might as well die together as perish apart. The boy could swim like a duck, and as Bent lowered a boat smartly, and the sharks held off, it was not long before Pete and Pete came aboard again. But, meantime, their master in his bunk did not even know that the ship had been hove to.

They emptied the water out of Pete the monkey and dried him, and they gave Pete the negro some rum. Both were jolly in an hour; and Skipper Spicer chose to take peculiar views of the gravity of the incident. He never kicked his cabin-boy again.

XI

OBI

WESTON WYNNE rode a hired horse through the wild lands lying behind Scarborough, in Tobago.

He constantly fell into thought and forgot the surrounding scene; but, if he did so, the lazy creature under him appeared mysteriously to know it. 'Napoleon,' instantly aware when his rider's attention deserted him and his operations, slowed down and occasionally stopped dead, with his nose in the green luxuriance of the wayside. Then Wynne returned to himself once more, rated 'Napoleon' and pushed forward again.

They came to a fair place presently, where streams of pure, bright water wound through the woods and flashed like silver under the gorgeous colours of a tropical wilderness. Great trees decked with veils of lichen and adorned with white orchid blossoms hung over the rivulet; anthuriums, vast-leaved philodendra, ferns and trailing parasites innumerable covered the banks with a tangle of lush life; and upon many a bough and branch, where their flying seeds had fastened, there clustered little grey dog-pines in sprightly companies. The hill-side was rich in wild plantain, wild indigo, guinea grass, cotton, cashew palms and cabbage palms; one tree on the stream

OBI

brink glowed with purple flowers, and other lesser shrubs beneath it flashed feathery red-gold through the green. A king-bird, like a little image of new bronze, sat on a stone by the water, and sugar-birds and humming-birds made the hot air glitter with their sparkling shapes.

The stream itself reminded the young traveller of little rivers in his native land. He had seen such in Devon, though here another sort of volcanic boulder took the place of the granite. The waters bustled merrily along with whirls and eddies, with flashing falls and still, placid reaches that mirrored the flaming flora of the banks ; but, instead of brake and bramble and heather, here were ferns and tangles of stephanotis or allamanda.

Weston Wynne was come to the West Indies on a sad errand. Roland Wynne, his father, the overseer of the Fort King George Sugar Factory, had suddenly disappeared from his home. That accidental death had overtaken him appeared certain, for ample evidences of the fact were recorded. All particulars reached the dead man's son by letter, and since Roland Wynne had many interests in Tobago, and the lawyers seemed unwilling to wind up his affairs, Weston Wynne, a partner in a London stockbroking firm, determined to go abroad and settle matters on the spot. A sum of ten thousand pounds was involved, and he alone had interest in the estate.

The young man hardly knew his father, for he had been sent home soon after his third year, and with the exception of a visit to Tobago when he

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

left school at fifteen years old and before he went into an office, he had never seen him. That was twelve years ago, and he only remembered a brown, taciturn man who spoke little, but was always kind and generous. He recollects their excursions together. The father had ridden everywhere with his boy, showed him the works and the various enterprises in which he was interested, had taken him to see his few friends, who left no impression on his mind, and to visit an ancient native Obi man—an experience that the lad never forgot. Toby Pierce the strange creature was called, and Wynne remembered still his den—a grotesque place full of things that to the lad's intelligence had seemed weird and horrible indeed.

Weston recollects how Toby Pierce had been useful to his father, for the cult of Obeah was a living myth yet, and the youth remembered what his father told him on that former visit. His memory even recalled the identical words spoken, though as a boy he had missed their irony.

"Time has not rooted his primitive faith out of the Ethiopian's mind. Quashie treasures his aboriginal gods and demons quite as much as any that the missionaries have presented him with. But our negroes mix their creeds and take what they like from each. When a man or woman dies, the 'loup-garou' has to be reckoned with, you know—a vampire creature that is drawn to a dead nigger like a cat to fish. I've often heard the mourners singing through a long night to scare away loups-garou with *Hymns Ancient*

OBI

and Modern. So ancient and modern join hands and superstition is justified of her children from generation to generation. Loups-garou take off their skins when at work and hide them at the roots of a silk-cotton tree. Naturally it is very desirable to find these skins, because without them the monsters die—catch a chill, I expect. I've never found one yet, but perhaps you will, Weston, if you hunt carefully. Myself, I have the greatest respect for Obi, and Pierce is an old friend of mine. We used to have epidemics of thievery in this island, and Christianity and the Eighth Commandment were powerless to stop them. The cane disappeared by the hundred-weight till Toby Pierce came to me and promised to settle the matter for a stiff consideration. And he kept his word. The old black devil put Fort King George plantations under Obeah—a high-sounding performance, though it merely consisted in tying empty bottles and bright-coloured rags and rubbish on sticks all round the estate. But he was right—we never lost another cane."

Weston Wynne had spent two months with the harbour-master of Tobago, an old friend of his father, and now, his affairs completed, was about to return home. The properties that accrued to him on Roland Wynne's death were not to his taste as investments, and he had already completed operations for the sale of shares in a large, local, agave-hemp estate, found a purchaser for a grove of coco-nut palms beside the sea and sold considerable gardens of cocoa and nutmeg, which

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

local men were willing to take off his hands. In the course of his business with certain merchants and magnates of the island, Wynne had detected a general attitude not wholly friendly to his vanished parent. Himself, he was still under thirty—a frank and straightforward young man, the junior partner in a prosperous business—and Roland Wynne it was who had bought him the partnership and laid the foundations of a successful career. Half the dead man's capital went to that enterprise, and the son entertained nothing save regard for the memory of a generous father; but he found his own natural affection not widely reflected at Tobago. None, indeed, in his hearing spoke an evil word against the dead; but, at best, his former companions were indifferent; at worst, they implied to Weston's sensitive ear a measure of dislike and disrespect. His host was evasive when he remarked on this experience.

"Think nothing of it," said Teddy Rice, the harbour-master, an Irishman. "Your father kept himself to himself and neither sought nor cultivated friends. In business he was frankly a hard man. He let nothing he could shift or circumvent come between him and his purpose. He was too clever for us here, and there are men among us who have a long memory for a bad deal. Nobody has any quarrel with you, at any rate, and I can assure you that most of us were sorry enough when he came by his tragic end—sorry enough and surprised enough."

The taking off of Roland Wynne had been

OBI

strange, and his son found a local suspicion that the apparent manner of it differed widely from the truth.

For two days the vanished planter was reported missing from his home; then his clothes were found on a lonely beach at the north side of the island. They lay on a rock fifty yards from the limit of the sea, and from this spot footmarks extended to the water. These left no distinct impression in the soft sand, but suggested that Wynne, suddenly tempted to bathe, had followed his inclination and never returned to the shore. His horse stood tethered under the shadow of trees a quarter of a mile distant, and it was through the neighing of the creature that searchers had first been drawn to the spot. Once in the sea, Wynne might have died of cramp or shock, or he might have been destroyed by a shark. But the improbability of the overseer riding to this lonely spot and deliberately entering the water seemed so extreme that none felt satisfied that the circumstantial evidence could be trusted.

The harbour-master dilated on this subject for the benefit of Roland Wynne's son.

"If his watch and purse had been missing, then we might fairly have argued a crime; but they weren't. He had, as you know, ten pounds in gold in his pocket and his gold watch and chain as well. Also that pocket-book you had. Some men thought, and still think, that your father did away with himself; but I'm not one of them. He wasn't that sort at all and I'm sure found his

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

life very well worth living. But to me the grand mystery is why on earth he wanted to go bathing. That was a most fantastic and unlikely amusement for a man of his age and habits."

"That's a question of fact, I suppose? He must have done it," said Weston. "He may have been suffering from the heat and taken a sudden fancy for a swim, for I remember when I was a boy out here one winter he taught me to swim in the bathing pool."

"He never suffered from heat in his life," answered Rice, "and no more did another man who came to an end in exactly the same way. That's another story—fifteen years old—and yet we ancient Tobagans were reminded of it by your father's death, because it is an identical mystery and was never explained and never will be. Yes, it's fifteen years ago at least since Bertram Stockley vanished off Tobago. And he went bathing too, and his clothes were found not half-a-mile from where they found your father's. Stockley was a coco-nut grower—an amiable sort of chap without enemies. And then, again, he was well over seventy when he disappeared—a man as likely to go bathing as a land crab. Everything appeared quite straightforward at his death, too, and the tragedies are parallel in almost all particulars, save that in Stockley's case no horse was involved. He lived on that side of the island and his home wasn't a mile from where he disappeared."

"Is there any possible way of connecting the

two incidents?" inquired the young man; but the other shook his head.

"I wondered the same thing, but nobody here sees any link, except that in both cases the circumstantial evidence points to a most unlikely accident. Black men go into the water with comparative impunity, though they've been snapped up sometimes; but that an experienced white should take the chances, and above all such men as these, is wildly improbable. For my part, I doubt if either of them ever went near the water."

So the matter stood, and while Wynne mourned his father's end and would have made every effort to solve the problem had opportunity offered, it was impossible that he could feel any deep emotion or reach such sorrow as he must have endured in different circumstances. His father was no more than a well-loved name to him, not a personality.

He rode now on an excursion to amuse himself and the little stream reminded him that here, in his boyhood, he had come with his father to see a famous wizard who lived near by. To his youthful eyes Toby Pierce had seemed a creature of infinite age, and forgetting the point of view, he doubted not that the negro was long dead.

Some negresses were filling calabashes with water at the river, and Weston, drawing up his lazy horse, chatted with them. They loved to talk and were full of local information, for the most part untrustworthy. Sometimes they contradicted each other and argued shrilly together. Once or twice the rider confounded them himself

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

and volunteered the truth respecting the names of plants and other things. When he did so, the girls fell in with his opinion at once, and agreed that he was right and they were wrong.

"Dat so, Massa—Massa too clebber!" they said.

He asked them whether they knew anybody called Toby Pierce.

"He used to live out this way; though I expect that was before your time," said the visitor; but then the water-carriers all spoke at once and assured him they knew Toby and that he was very much alive.

"Him terrible ole, secret man, sar—most dangerous ole man—you no' go near him—he Obi man an' do fearful tings!"

"I'm not afraid of him, Jane," answered Weston, "he won't hurt me. I thought he must be dead years ago."

"Obi man him nebber die, sar—de Debble look after him," said another girl.

"Where does he live, that's what I want to know?"

They pointed the way and, giving them money to buy cakes, Weston left the party, rode on and followed a rough track that presently abandoned the stream to climb up a little secluded knoll at the very edge of the jungle. On the summit there stood a negro dwelling—one somewhat larger than most. Its walls were dirt colour and the roof was thatched with palm leaves. The place came back to the traveller's vision unchanged after the absence of years, and he well remembered arriving there on a pony beside his father.

OBI

The spot was silent, the house of the Obi doctor very lonely. No sign of life appeared before the open door, but fragments of things that had lived adorned it, for on either side of the entrance lay a bullock's skull bleached silver-white by the suns of many years. A patch of sweet potatoes and a pomegranate-tree stood beside the hut, and the estate of Toby Pierce also comprised a few banana clumps, where hung some heavy clusters of fruit. His boundaries were marked by a wire fencing, on which danced feathers and depended old beer bottles at intervals of three yards. Within this zone no man might enter uninvited, and it is certain that no black man would have done so; but Weston Wynne felt no fear. His only interest was psychological and centred in the consciousness that these things, long faint in memory, now flashed sharply out again. He tethered his horse at the fence, strode over it and walked towards the hut. Then he lifted his voice and shouted:

“Massa Pierce—Massa Toby Pierce!”

He was answered, and a very singular human being appeared from behind the hut. The creature carried an old rifle and wore nothing but a pair of tattered pants and a necklace of white teeth. He was very ancient and his ribs made a gridiron of his lean breast. His limbs were leather and bone, and so thin was he that the bones threatened to break the skin. His scanty wool was reduced to white tufts over his ears, and a tangled network of furrows and deep lines scarred his shrunken face, over which shone the dome of his skull. His deep-seated black

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

eyes shone brightly, and his countenance was alert and intelligent, despite its ugliness.

"Who want Toby?" he asked. "Who you, sar? Dis my land yo' walk on."

"You don't remember me? How should you? Yet I've been in your house before to-day, Toby."

"I no' 'member, massa," he answered, looking intently at the visitor.

"But you remember my poor father. It was he who brought me to see you ten years and more ago, when I was a youngster."

"What his name, den?"

Toby showed a good deal of independence and was not much interested in the stranger. But soon his manner changed, and on hearing that the son of Roland Wynne stood before him, he became much more alive.

"My father died strangely, you know, and I came out here to settle his affairs. And I remember that he thought a lot of you, Toby, so I decided that I'd look you up before I sailed."

"Me Gard! Yo' Marse Wynne's son?"

"I am. He brought me here to see you when I was a child, and told me how clever you were in frightening the niggers away from the sugar-cane."

"Well, well! Yo' Marse Wynne's boy—dat so? Poor gem'man. Berry sad him die."

"I can't understand it, Toby. What did you make of it?"

Toby reflected and shook his withered head.

"A dam bad business, sar. I say nuffin, but I fink a lot."

OBI

"And another chap, they tell me, disappeared in the same way years ago."

"Dey 'member 'bout dat? Him go same way as po' Marse Wynne. Dar's wicked men in Tobago sure 'nuff."

Toby appeared to be full of mystery, and the other scented light. He began to wonder whether he might be on the track of his father's murderers, and even imagined that the ancient man before him knew more than he chose to tell.

"If there was foul play, Toby, I'd pay a pretty long price to get to the bottom of it. Those who knew my father best, don't for a moment believe he ever went down to bathe in the sea."

Toby Pierce nodded and mumbled to himself.

"Dar plenty hid; but who care what one ole man say?"

"You know something, Toby?"

"Wait here, Marse Wynne," answered the other. "You go see yo' horse him tie up safe—den you come in and I tell you what happen to yo' farder. I know—I know—I know whar him am dis minute!"

"Good God! Not alive?"

"No, sar—him gone plenty dead. I tell you 'bout him, an' I tell you who kill him. You wait dar an' I call you in one, two minute."

The ancient hopped off into his den, leaving the rifle at the door. He was lame, but moved with great agility. The young man felt dazed before the thought of a coming revelation, and marvelled what it might be. Already he wondered if one among those he had met in Tobago would prove

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

to be his father's enemy. Had he already shaken the hand responsible for Roland Wynne's death? But the negro might know nothing, and lie to gain some private end or make some money.

Toby had hardly disappeared before he was back again.

Already Wynne's hopes cooled, for nothing but patent greed now sat in the old man's face.

"One ting 'fore you come in my house," he said. "You pay me for what I tell?"

"Yes, I will. If you can bring me face to face with my father's murderer and prove it, I'll give you plenty of money."

"Hundred pound, sar?"

"Yes, Toby."

"I Obi man—I wise. Nobody done quarrel wid me—dey frighten'."

"I'm not frightened—nor was my father. He was your friend. Obi's all humbug, and you know it is, Toby."

Toby laughed—a loud, cracked chuckle.

"Dat so, massa—you too clebber for poor ole nigger. But you no' tell de folk I humbug dem."

"They wouldn't believe me if I did."

They entered and it was some moments before the visitor's eyes grew accustomed to the gloom. Then weird and bizarre objects thrust upon his gaze from every side. Dead creatures haunted the place and were propped in corners or hung on the walls with a hideous semblance of living. Festoons of eggs and empty bottles depended from the roof; skins of animals and

OBI

birds littered the floor; strange, malodorous smells greeted Wynne's nostrils.

There was a square of red glass let into the ceiling, and from it across the velvet gloom fell a flaming eye of light upon a three-legged table with a copper face. A lump of glass lay here and flashed as though red-hot. Filth, mystery and darkness shared the hole, and across one corner was hung a curtain which concealed Arcanum—the holy of holies. Near it squatted a little, black, almost naked woman, with a dirty red garment drawn over her middle. Her eyes were shut, and the visitor perceived her face shrunken, with an appearance of infinite age. She sat quite motionless and appeared to be as dead as the other fragments of animal mortality—shriveled apes and bloated reptiles—perched around her.

So, indeed, it proved.

"Dat my po' wife, sar—she mummy—she die, an' I lub her too well to put her in de ground, so I stuff po' Mamie—an' dar she sit. She alway berry quiet lady; but now she nebber say nuffin—po' gal!"

Weston stared at the corpse and edged farther away from it. Obi was doubtless all rubbish, as he had affirmed and Toby allowed; but he could well understand the psychological effect of such a den on any ignorant mind. He liked it little himself. There was something magnetic and mesmeric about Toby. Wynne felt it.

Drawing a chair, Massa Pierce dusted it and begged his visitor to be seated. Then he cleared the little brass table.

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"I fetch gem'man a drink, den I tell him who kill his farder," said Toby. "I tank God Him send Marse Wynne's son to hear 'bout it."

He brought out two calabash bowls, a bottle of Hollands, and a jar of water. Then, pouring the spirit into the bowls, he added water and drank from his own.

"Good luck an' berry long life, sar. An' now I tell him dat it Marse Teddy Rice, de harbour-massa —dat dam villain kill your farder. I prove 'bout it. Him pretend him friend, an' he kill him."

"Rice! Good Lord, Toby, what a mad idea! The last person on earth to do such a thing—my father's best friend in Tobago."

"I hab de proof, sar. I fetch dem for you. Drink de Hollands—yo'farder gib me dat bottle an' plenty udder bottles. I no' get no more now him gone."

Toby emptied his own calabash, then rose and went behind the curtain. Weston heard a door shut. He sat bewildered, and felt that he was breathing some creepy essence. He gasped and felt his blood beating through his arteries.

It seemed unspeakably mad to suggest that Rice could have had any hand in his father's death; and yet the knowledge that no accident had destroyed Roland Wynne did not astonish the young man. His mind moved slowly, heavily.

Something in the foul air of Toby's den made him drowsy. He felt thirsty, too, for his own flask had been emptied long ago. He lifted his calabash. Toby had not returned, but he heard the sound of a man digging outside. Then he prepared to drink,

OBI

and the bowl was actually at his lips when his eyes happened to fall on the mummy of the woman in the corner, and he saw that her eyes were open.

A moment before they had been glued together in the puckered and withered face; a moment afterwards they were glued together again. Not a sign or tremor of life was revealed by the creature, but he could have sworn that she had looked at him.

Something as near to fear as he had ever felt took young Wynne at his waistband. He knew by a sudden, deep premonition that he stood in great danger, and panic terror nearly lifted him from his seat and sent him flying to his horse.

But he mastered it, called upon his reason, and made that play servant to the intuition that now warned him of peril. What the peril might be and how he had incurred it he could not guess. For a moment his mind flew to the other extreme, and he was inclined to laugh at himself and his hallucination.

But reason saved the situation, for he was a reasonable man, without much imagination or power of dreaming in his waking hours. He believed himself in danger, yet knew not in the least its nature. Yet he could trust his eyes. The creature in the corner by the curtain was alive, and she had certainly been watching him.

She must not know that he had marked her; he must proceed as though unsuspecting. He turned his back on her, took out his flask, poured some of the contents of the calabash into it, whistled cheerfully, and then shouted out to Toby :

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

"Come on, old boy ; I want another drink."

Then he lifted the calabash to his mouth and made a sound as though emptying the contents down his throat, though in reality he avoided doing so.

His manœuvre met with an immediate and terrifying response. He heard a scream behind him, and turned to see Toby's wife leap from her chair and rush away. The little monster yelled at him :

"Yo' dead ! Yo' dead man !"

Then she cried to Toby :

"Him drink—him drink de calabash. Dig him grave, Toby !"

He heard a laugh outside, and Massa Pierce went on with his operations.

Wynne's first instinct was to fight; but he knew not what powers the Obi doctor might have in reserve. He made a bolt, therefore, dashed after Mamie, who had joined her husband, and, running to the fence, mounted his horse and flogged the astonished steed into a gallop.

It seemed, however, that he was not to escape, for his hasty departure and power to mount the horse told the enemy that no drop from the fatal calabash had passed his victim's lips.

He snatched up his rifle, which stood at the door, and at a range of less than fifty yards fired at Wynne just as his steed broke into a gallop. The horse reared and the man fell off. Then the frightened creature galloped away, and Massa Pierce, putting another cartridge into his weapon, came limping down to finish the victim, if necessary.

But from this moment fortune ceased to smile on the Obi man, and Wynne, in a fury of passion, leapt from the ground at his approach, dashed upon him, and tore the gun from his hand. It was the horse, not the rider, that had been hit, and, with the muzzle of his own rifle at the small of his back, Toby was now driven to trudge the six long miles that separated his habitation from the port.

The negro passed the time for his captor, and poured undying hate and the reason for it into the young man's ear. It was not a long story, and that night, when Toby lay safe in Scarborough gaol and half-a-dozen black policemen had set out to catch Mamie and find the stricken horse, Wynne gave the harbour-master particulars of his adventure, and then proceeded to Toby's own narrative.

"I hope the old devil was lying," he said, "for he's told me something that will darken my days for ever, if it's true. It may be, though nobody can prove the truth of it now my father is dead.

"For some time, when he found the game was up, the old brute said nothing. Our progress was slow, because he is lame and could only crawl. He wanted night to come down and give him a chance to make a bolt; but we fell in with a couple of policemen, and though they were evidently frightened out of their wits at Toby, they did as I bade them and kept me company till I got him to the station and saw him under lock and key.

"It seems, according to him, that he and my father were very thick many years ago, and that

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

he was very useful to my father in all sorts of blackguard ways. I never will believe it, for if it's true there must have been a side to my father I neither knew nor guessed at—or anybody else, I should hope. But he says that he and my father were hand and glove, and that he did many a dirty trick and was useful to my father over and over again, and put away more than one nigger for him. He asked me who bought Bertram Stockley's coco-nut grove when he was supposed to be drowned fifteen years ago, and, of course, I knew that my father did. Then he swore he put away Stockley, and that the man never went near the sea, but lies buried in his own compound outside his den. And—it's horrible, Rice—he says my father fell out with him a month before he died, and turned on him, and stopped certain payments and so on, knowing that Toby's word could do him no harm, and would not be believed against him. If that's true, it's terribly clear that my father did not guess how strong and agile the old wretch is still. At any rate, he doomed himself by that quarrel. Toby waited his time and cringed, and never let my father guess what he meant to do. Then, after stalking him for some weeks, he got him on a lonely ride and shot him through the head, as he tried to shoot me. He took his horse and his clothes where they were found, and buried him with the other. That can be proved or disproved, of course."

"And why did he want to poison you?" asked Teddy Rice.

OBI

"Because I am my father's son. As soon as he heard that, he hated me, and was determined to settle me too. So he got me in and hatched the yarn about you to distract my mind and make me forget him. What kept me from drinking was the accidental glint in that old hag's eye. He'd set her to watch that I drank, because, no doubt, a mouthful would have had me down and out in a twinkling, and when she shut her eyes again, not guessing I'd seen them open, I tumbled to it all in a flash, and acted accordingly. Some of the liquor he meant for me is still in my flask. And one thing's certain—the money I had for the coconut-trees must be given to any heirs of poor Stockley who are known to exist."

"Your father paid for the trees, my boy."

"It's an awful thing—hard to believe for a son."

"A man doesn't choose his own father, anyhow. But don't be too inquiring, my dear Wynne. Naturally the people here weren't going to speak against the dead to you ; and for my part I liked Roland very well, though I couldn't help knowing he was a bit of a buccaneer in his methods. He was always straight enough with me. But you can speak of him as you found him, and think of him as you remember him."

"He was a rare good father anyway, Rice."

"Then let it go at that. We can prove whether Toby was lying, though I don't think he was, myself. We shall get at the truth when he is tried at Trinidad."

But Toby Pierce was never tried. He escaped

BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

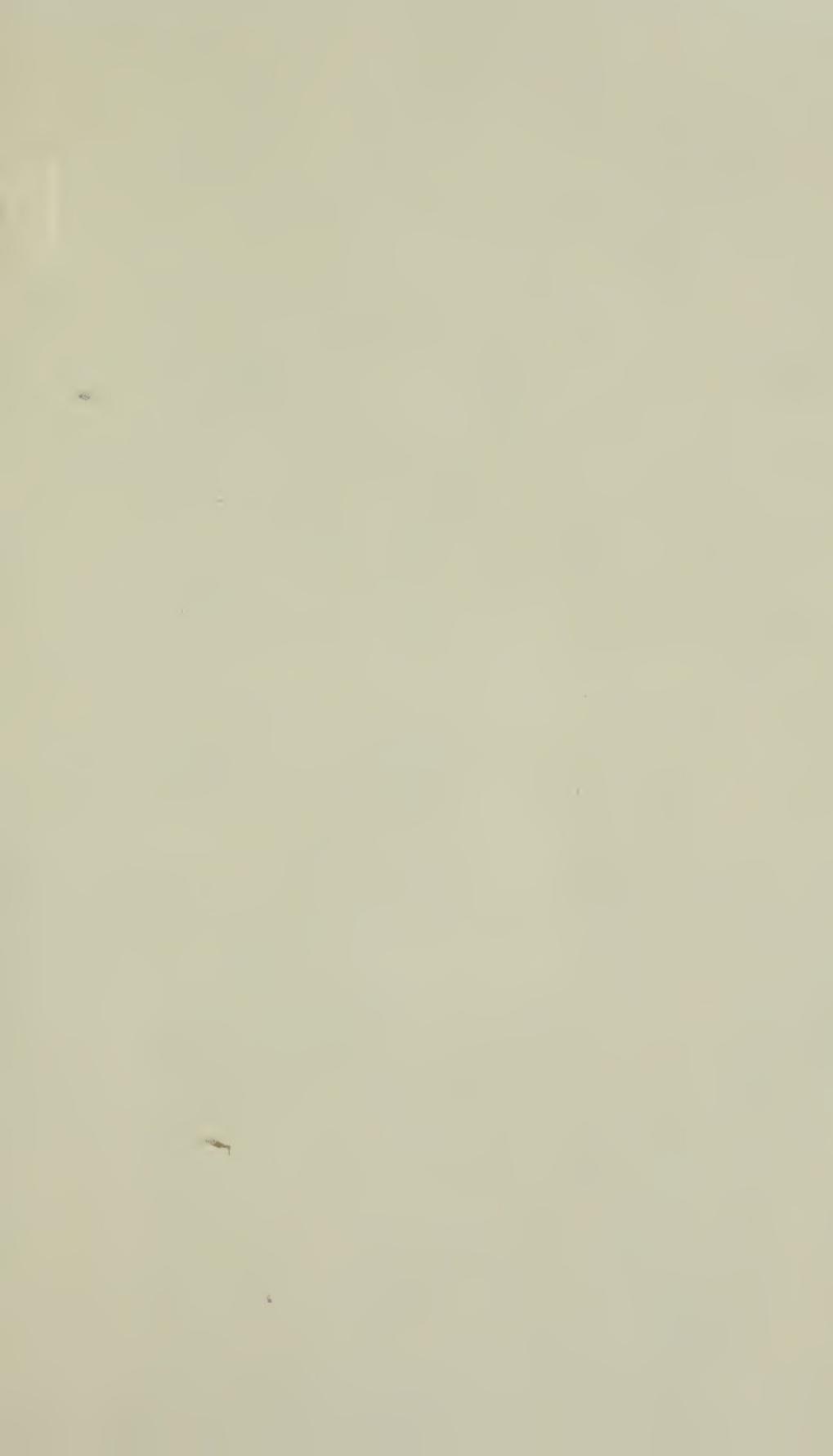
judgment and sentence, for a negro warder, peeping into his solitary cell after midnight, found the old reprobate had strangled himself with his waistbelt.

Teddy Rice was wont to tell the end of the tale in his own fashion.

"In death they were not divided, and after Mamie saw her husband marched away by young Wynne she knew the game was up, and had poisoned herself before the boys got to her.

"As for the rest, they found the Obi man's garden-patch a proper bone-yard. There was poor Roland Wynne right enough, with a bullet-hole bored through his head, alongside a skeleton we took to be Stockley's. And half-a-dozen niggers slept their last sleep close at hand. Toby, sure of his prey, was already digging another grave for our young friend when he gave him the slip. No, we haven't encouraged Obi since then. Any nigger starting that racket in Tobago will get himself disliked. This is a very advanced island nowadays. As for me, I was only sorry for the visitor. It's a nasty jar to find your father such a shady customer—especially if you're dead straight yourself. A pity every way, because Weston Wynne will always be a bad advertisement for the West Indies, and we need all the friendship we can get from England in these hard times. We're like my native Ulster—want to stick to her, if she'll let us. But there'll be the deuce to pay if she tries to square her American debts with us. Faith, Tobago won't stand for it! She'll rise like one man."

THE END



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